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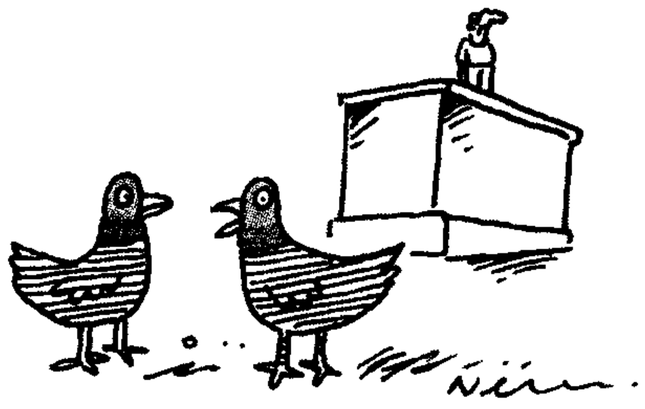

"Gormley turned me down for the 4th plinth"

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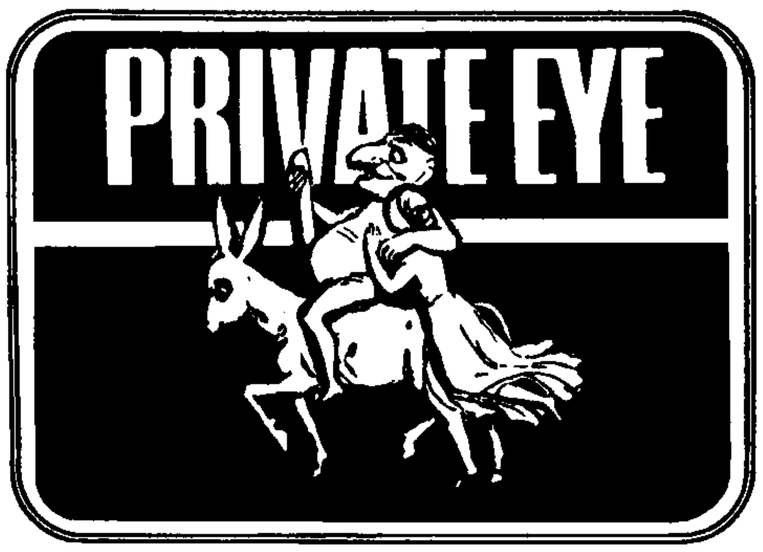


WHO could doubt Gordon Brown and Alistair Darling's sincerity in cancelling this year's comprehensive spending review (CSR) because of economic uncertainty rather than for the political advantage of not having to admit the obvious truth that they will have to cut spending?

For that matter, who in their right mind would think of announcing spending plans in the midst of such fiscal unpredictability? Er, actually Alistair Darling would.

Introducing the last biennial CSR in October 2007, Darling told parliament: "The background to this year's [pre-budget] report and spending review is a time of increased international economic uncertainty and more fragile global environment, which has already seen turbulence in America, Asia and Europe."

Back then there was real uncertainty over the public finances, as the difference between Darling's cloud cuckoo land predictions and events has borne out. Now one thing is in fact pretty sure: his finances are in the deepest doo-doo on record, if only he would face up to it.

PS: Gordon Brown introduced spending reviews covering three years a month after becoming chancellor in 1997. "Too much attention has been given to current spending and muddling through," he claimed. Thank goodness those days are far behind us!

QUOTE OF THE WEEK

"'Stick a red rose on the front and it could be a Labour manifesto.' So said a Whitehall mandarin about the document which is widely-known in Whitehall as Gordon's 'National Plan' – a title dropped to avoid any unfortunate Stalinist overtones." – *BBC political editor* ***Nick Robinson*** *on the launch of* Building Britain's Future

WRITING in the *Observer* last weekend, Audit Commission chief executive Steve Bundred called for "severe pay restraint" in the public sector. This would be one "pain-free way of cutting public spending" in the face of the economic crisis since inflation is only expected to be 2-3 percent.

Nurses and other government workers on less than £20,000 a year point out that a real terms pay cut is hardly pain-free. But it would be for certain public sector workers such as… Audit Commission bosses. Last year Bundred earned £198,000, or ten times a nurse's salary, plus a £14,000 performance-related bonus (which unlike other such pay in the public sector is "pensionable") and a £36,000 pension contribution to take his pot to £916,000.

Meanwhile, the Audit Commission's tax-avoiding chairman Michael O'Higgins bagged £87,000 from the taxpayer for a two-day week (£217,000 full-time equivalent), which he now supplements with fees of between £5,000 and £10,000 as non-executive director of the Treasury, along with income from "strategic consulting and coaching".

All of which should help ease the pain to come.

● *Higgins takes the Michael, p. 28*

Your mourning paper

■ **Man in the *Mirror*, *Sun*, *Mail*: Jackoballs** 7, 27
■ **Brown-nosing, Bercow-style: HP Sauce** 8
■ **The mullahs' tale: Rot off the Press** 9
■ **Mark Byford, the BBC's 'Mr Pension'** 11
■ **Shell and the spooks: Letter from Abuja** 17
■ **Charity begins in Paris; plus pubs, foster care and more: In the Back** 28-30

NEWS FROM THE SANDPIT

HOW long before the Ministry of Defence provides soldiers in Afghanistan with vehicles capable of protecting them?

The MoD claims the improvised explosive devices (IEDs) used by the Taliban are now much more powerful and beyond the capacity of any protection. But that is not always the case – the mine that killed Lieutenant-Colonel Rupert Thorneloe and Trooper Joshua Hammond last week, for example, was par for the course.

The truth is that soldiers are being killed because of the astonishing slowness of British defence procurement. Vehicles are available that offer a very high degree of mine protection built into their design – the Mastiff is one of them – but because of delays and ministerial incompetence, there aren't enough of them "in theatre".

Thorneloe and Hammond were in a Viking vehicle when they were killed, while others have died in Jackals, bought in haste to replace the lightly armoured "snatch" Land Rover. Neither has adequate, built-in mine protection. Nor is it a question of a lack of funds: the MoD has spent millions on vehicles already. It's simply bought the wrong ones. Again.

Meanwhile, there are equipment problems too in the training arena. Two weeks ago armed forces minister Bill Rammell admitted in parliament that for items like night vision equipment and Osprey body armour, availability was "below 50 percent". For armoured carriers modified to theatre entry standards, training on which is crucial before going to the frontline, "availability ranges from below 50 percent… to nearly 60 percent".

'Squarebasher'

● *See Defence: Debt knell, p. 28*

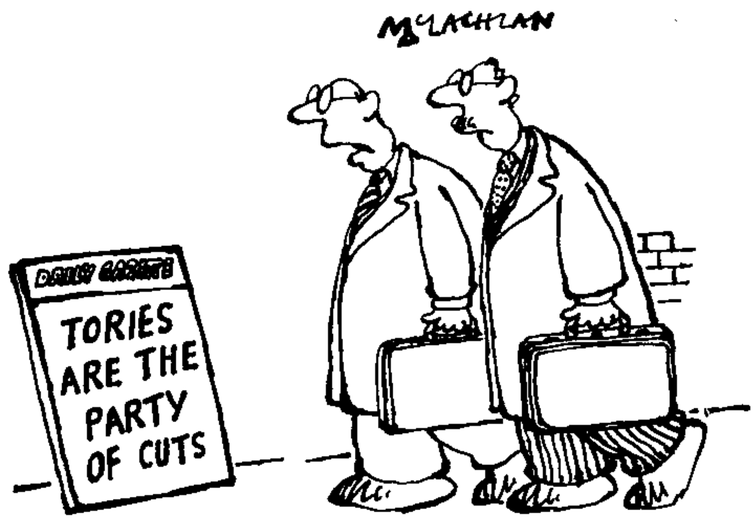
TRIAL OF THE CENTURY

■ **Desmond vs Bower – the Eye's court report, coming soon.**

NUMBER CRUNCHING

0% "Rise" in public spending predicted by Gordon Brown under Labour in 2013/14

-12% "Rise" in those intending to vote Labour under Brown in next election



"I hate to see spelling mistakes"

Street Of Shame

EVEN by the vicious standards of the *Daily Mail*, last month's "celebration" dinner at Brown's Hotel to mark the retirement of Paul Dacre's long-suffering deputy Alistair Sinclair was a particularly ill-tempered affair.

Internet editor Martin Clarke and *Mail on Sunday* deputy editor Eric Bailey almost came to blows after Bailey suggested that the abysmally downmarket *Mail* website was only interested in "tits and bums" (which it is). Clarke responded by telling Bailey to fuck off and threatened to ban all *Mail on Sunday* content from "his" website.

The well-refreshed pair continued to trade foul-mouthed insults in front of Lord Rothermere until reaching the traditional schoolboy climax of "let's go outside and sort this out" – a particularly comic prospect given that Clarke smokes so much he can barely manage a flight of stairs and Bailey looks to be about 65 years old. Eventually, Clarke – mocked by the rest of the diners – stormed off home in a huff. But he was not the only one. In an elegant but gently provocative speech, Lord Rothermere pointed out that the campaigns run by the *Daily Mail* were always better when Sinclair was in charge (which he often was). Dacre was furious – he will brook no criticism from anyone, not even his employer – and told anyone who would listen the next day that he would prove the chairman wrong.

The result? The spectacularly misjudged wheelie bins campaign, "Not In My Front Yard", which Dacre passionately believed would "raise a roar for freedom of choice" but which failed to provoke anything more than a mild chortle of bemusement across Britain.

GORDON BROWN, with his usual generosity of spirit, arrived late at Rebekah Wade's nuptials and stayed for no more than half an hour. David Cameron and George Osborne, by contrast, both enjoyed themselves enormously.

"It's *so* exciting!" Osborne chirruped. "It's just like 1997!" *Indie* supremo Simon Kelner retorted that there was a big difference between New Labour in '97 and the Tories today: "Nobody likes you." Kelner was so pleased with his witticism he repeated it several times for Osborne's benefit.

Kelner was, of course, thoroughly tired and emotional. So was Will Lewis, the ever-thirsty helmsman of the good ship *Telegraph*. One would expect nothing less from these two legendary shandy-slurpers. Yet both missed out on the "drunkest wedding guest" award – which went, surprisingly, to Rupert Murdoch, variously described as "shit-faced", "rat-arsed" and "boiled-as-an-owl".

It seems he may still be suffering the after-effects. At News International two weeks ago, hacks and executives were treated to an hour-long address by James Murdoch, complete with Powerpoint presentations and lashings of management-speak. It was all too much for Rupert, who fell into a deep sleep while his anointed heir held forth. Sober up, Digger!

WITH the Queen costing us all 69p a week, *Daily Express* readers were invited to give their views on the controversy.

"Are you willing to pay more to the Queen?" asked the telephone poll. Underneath was the rider: "Calls cost 25p from a BT landline. Texts cost 25p plus network operator rates."

Voting in Dirty Desmond's poll therefore cost more than four months' worth of Royal "tax".

NO PAPER was more eager to publish details of BBC executives' expenses than the *Sun* and the *Times*, which went to town with big spreads expressing outrage at all that licence-fee cash – £363,000 over five years – being splurged by the top brass on dinners in Las Vegas, champagne, etc.

As the Murdoch papers know, there's nothing that gladdens the Digger's heart like a bit of Beeb-baiting, his particular beef being that such profligacy would never be found in the private sector.

Really? This hair-shirted attitude to BBC expenses is in fact at odds with what happens in the Digger's own News Corporation empire. Take Peter Chernin, for example, his long-serving right-hand man in America. He earned a modest $28.8m last year, the package even including his $18,000-a-year tab for "country club" membership. Chernin stepped down on 30 June but is being kept sweet over the next six years with secretarial services worth more than $1m, the use of the Murdoch corporate jet for 50 hours a year (worth $1.65m), and a company car and driver worth $210,000. And we thought BBC executives had it good!

THIRSTY Will Lewis of the *Telegraph* may have been thwarted by Rebekah Wade in his ambition to run News International, but he is more determined than ever to rise from being mere editor-in-chief to a chief executive. He is off to Harvard Business School in the autumn on a $60,000 two-month "advanced management programme" for wannabe CEOs.

News of Lewis's Harvard trip emerged in the *Financial Times*, which just happened to run a separate feature the same day by agony-aunt columnist Lucy Kellaway, entitled "Am I mad to invest in a Harvard course in a downturn?" Kellaway's response to an anonymous, fortysomething male director: "Yes, you are mad… You will irritate your chairman by going away and irritate him even more when you come back spouting the stuff that you have picked up in your short time there… I can think of other things I'd rather do with $60,000."

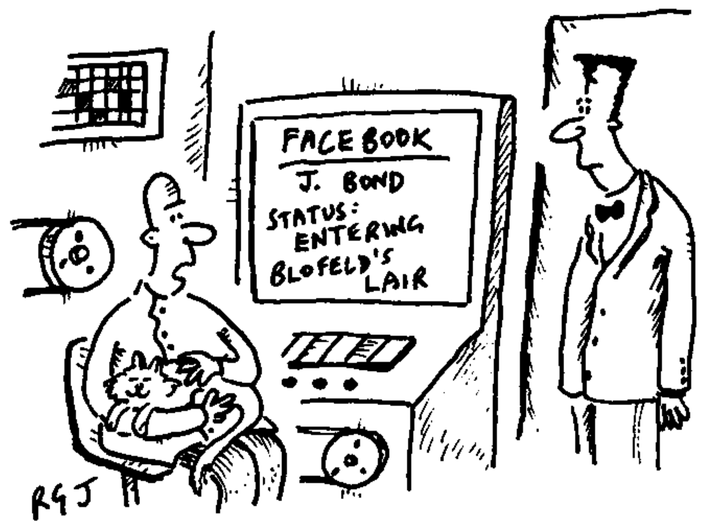
Irked by her insolence, the *Telegraph* retaliated the following day with a story about the woes at the cash-strapped *FT* where staff are "finding out the hard way how we live in financial times" and being urged to take extra holiday this summer for just 30 percent of salary. Few have been tempted, although *FT* editor Lionel Barber is among those taking an extra week's holiday. "What will he do with the extra time?" the *Telegraph* asked. "Perhaps some management training?"

SO DELIGHTED was the *Daily Mail* website with its discovery that a fake Twitter account had been set up in the name of foreign secretary David Miliband it could not resist crowing over those gullible enough to fall for the hoax.

"Jackson death exposes fake David Miliband 'Twitterjacker' (but not before Sky News fell for it)," the site chortled. "The charade was only discovered after Sky published the fake comments and newspapers used the remark in online tributes to the King of Pop."

But lo, what is this, still tweeting away in the hard copy of that morning's *Mail* which was still on sale across the country? "Foreign Secretary David Miliband wrote on his Twitter page: 'Never has one soared so high and yet dived so low. RIP Michael."

Punters would obviously be better off reading only the most reliable up-to-date news sources online – such as dailymail.co.uk, which was the only UK newspaper website to fall for a notorious internet hoax about actor Jeff Goldblum. "I'm sorry to report that Jeff Goldblum has died after falling on the set of his new movie," wrote diary hack Nathan Kay on his scintillating "party people" blog at 12.39 that very morning. Less than an hour later Kay deleted the entry and replaced it with a terse warning for his followers: "Grow up!!!"



"Ah, Mr Bond, I've been expecting you"

RICHARD ELLIS, the *Telegraph* group's reptilian "executive editorial director", has fired hacks galore over the past year or two, including dozens of sub-editors whose jobs have been "outsourced" to save money for the thrifty Barclay twins.

The task of subbing the *Daily* and *Sunday Telegraph* weekend supplements was recently contracted out to a firm in faraway Sydney, Australia. Now the *Weekly Telegraph*, the small but previously profitable newspaper for expats, is being relaunched as *The Telegraph*, under Ellis's supervision – and its production has been outsourced to a firm rather closer to home, a new London agency called 7daymedia.

Much closer to home, in fact: the production director of 7day media is one Jacqui Fuller – aka Richard Ellis's lover.

MICHAEL MARTIN, former Commons speaker, will receive his peerage behind closed doors, wrote an unnamed hack in the *Daily Mail*. The claim was substantiated by "palace sources" who confirmed that Martin was not due to attend one of the two official investitures at Buckingham Palace.

One "source" even told the *Mail* "He is not listed on any of the remaining investiture lists. It's possible that it will be done away from the cameras." Clearly, the palace source was not particularly well informed as a quick check of parliament's website would have revealed that "investitures for peerages were abandoned in the 17th century".

The reason for the 1621 ceremonial overhaul was that James I "conferred peerages at a rate which was unprecedented at the time", and the repetition of the ceremony "was perhaps embarrassing at a time when peerages were available for money". The website, however, does not mention the use of the upper chamber as a retirement home for doddery and disgraced MPs, or for re-homing former EU trade commissioners.

"IT COULD be a still from a classic Hollywood movie," sneered the *Daily Mail* back in April, when Madonna released a photograph of herself with Mercy James, the four-year-old Malawian girl she was trying to adopt.

"Her caring motherly character positively oozes from the photograph, which is lent further drama with its sepia tone. The image forms part of a carefully orchestrated PR campaign… released to media outlets around the world last night, it is clearly designed to present Madonna the matriarch and seems to have been airbrushed to make the pop star appear angelic, blemish-free and young."

That's no good! What the *Mail* wanted was what it got on 22 June, when, contrary to both its proprietor's solemn 1997 declaration that "his papers will not in future purchase pictures taken by paparazzi" and the press complaints commission rule that "Editors must not use the fame, notoriety or position of a parent or guardian as sole justification for publishing details of a child's private life", the paper printed the first long-lens image of Mercy snapped in the street outside Madonna's house.

"Her bewildered expression suggests she is finding London a rather confusing place," the paper simpered.

Jackoballs

Don't stop till you get enough

"FREE Michael Jackson souvenir supplement: the definitive 8-page special." – **Guardian, 27 June**

"INSIDE: 12-page tribute pullout – Jacko, King of Pop" – **Mirror, 27 June**

"Inside: 16-page supplement – Remembering the King of Pop" – **Times, 27 June**

"Jacko coverage: Pages 2,3,4,5,6,7,8,9,10,11,12, 13,14 & 15 and 16-page Souvenir Pullout" – **Sun, 27 June**

"But was it really necessary for the BBC (one of whose TV reporters in LA donned a black tie) to indulge in such besotted coverage…? Truly, we live in a world which no longer discerns between those who achieve fame, and the few who are genuinely touched by lasting greatness." – **Editorial, Daily Mail, 27 June. Jackson coverage filled pages 1-13 of the paper.**

"Two-thirds of Americans believe the media has given too much coverage to the sudden death of Michael Jackson." – **Report on Telegraph.co.uk, which has its own dedicated "Michael Jackson" page featuring 79 separate reports about his death**

Don't it make you wanna scream?

"Sellers were trying to cash in on Michael Jackson's death last night by flogging memorabilia on eBay. Hundreds of hastily printed 'Jacko memorial T-shirts', key rings and even computer mouse mats appeared on the popular internet auction site within hours of the King of Pop's death being announced." – **Mirror, 28 June**

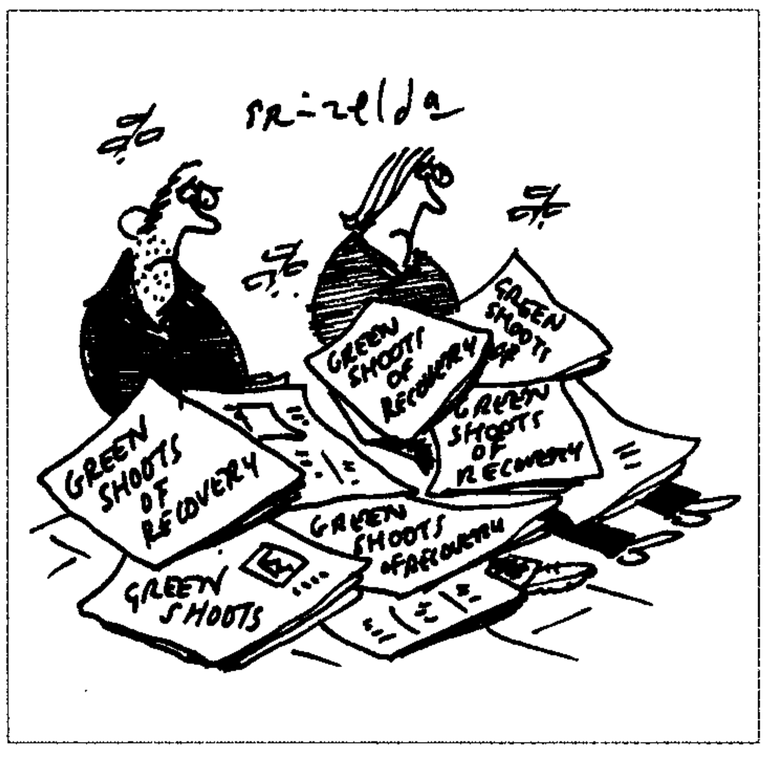
"OUT NOW: Michael Jackson – King of Pop celebrates his life through a selection of great images from the Daily Mirror archive… Part of the new Mirror Collection, price £4.99, delivery £1.50." – **Mirror, 30 June**

Bad, bad really really bad

"The Prime Minister's official spokesman said that this was very sad news for the millions of Michael Jackson fans in Britain and around the world and the Prime Minister's thoughts were with Michael Jackson's family at this time." – **Downing Street press briefing, 26 June**

"Mr Cameron said: 'I know Michael Jackson's fans in Britain and around the world will be sad today. Despite the controversies, he was a legendary entertainer.'" – **BBC News**

"Peter Mandelson: I'm not absolutely sure who Michael Jackson is. Is he the... he's called Jacko, isn't he?
FT: I believe so, in the idiom, yeah.
PM: No, I don't want to say anything about him, although I once nearly met him in Berlin." – **Interview, Financial Times**



"That this House celebrates the life and music of Michael Jackson; commends the role his music has played in uniting people from different cultures and challenging racial division in the US and around the world; notes that he sold an estimated 750m records worldwide and won 13 Grammy awards during his career; applauds his support for many charitable causes; and hopes that his legacy will endure." – **Early Day Motion tabled by Keith Vaz MP. Only other signatory: Alan Meale, Labour MP for Mansfield**

"There was only one choice for the first song at my civil partnership celebration. When Michael Jackson's *Billie Jean* began playing, everyone rushed to the dance floor… I danced to the Jackson Five as a boy and then as a young man to his great hits of the 1980s. I have always liked soul music and I love to move." – **Ben Bradshaw, Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport, Independent**

It's just another part of me

"If, like me, you're a baby boomer, Michael Jackson's death has had the uncomfortable side effect of reminding you of your own mortality. You miss the man or woman you were, way back in your misspent youth when you spent far more time than was sensible bumping and grinding to Jacko's genius with attractive strangers who tickled your fancy." – **Vanessa Feltz, Express**

"Until Friday I had never in my life knowingly, let alone deliberately, heard Michael Jackson sing." – **Peter Hitchens, Mail on Sunday**

"Almost 30 years ago, I was granted an audience with Michael Jackson." – **John Pidgeon, Mirror**

"I grew up in Chicago, the city nearest to Gary, Indiana, Michael's birthplace, and the Jacksons had been a kind of local Von Trapp family – familiar, accessible." – **Bonnie Greer, Guardian**

"There are very few people who can understand what Michael Jackson went through. David Cassidy, who I once interviewed, is one of them." – **Allison Pearson, Daily Mail**

Don't tell me you agree with me, when I saw you kicking dirt in my eye

"WITH ALL OUR LOVE AND PRAYERS: THE OFFICIAL TRIBUTE ISSUE – MICHAEL JACKSON IN LOVING MEMORY" – **Cover of OK!, which also features a picture of dying Jackson in ambulance on which magazine spent £500,000.**

"Jordy Chandler's Secret Diary of Sex Abuse" – **Double-page spread in "16-page Souvenir Tribute" in News of the World**

Remember the time

"So Michael Jackson got away with it, despite members of the jury thinking that he most probably did interfere with vulnerable star-struck youngsters. There are three youngsters I feel most sorry for in all of this horrible sordid mess, and they are Jackson's children… Jackson has emerged from the trial a sad, sick loser… I find that horribly disturbing." – **Lorraine Kelly, Sun, 18 June 2005**

"By all accounts, Jackson – although a controversial parent – doted on his children and they will be devastated to lose their father. We should all try to remember Michael as a caring but flawed human being..." – **Lorraine Kelly, Sun, 27 June 2009**

"La Toya Jackson revealed her superstar brother Michael will NEVER return to his notorious Neverland ranch. La Toya said: 'He hasn't been there in about six years - he hasn't been there since the trial. He says he never wants to see it again. He doesn't want to be there. The memories are so awful.'" – **Sun, 23 Jan 2009**

"Michael Jackson will tomorrow return to his beloved Neverland ranch – where his body will lie in state for grieving fans to say their goodbyes." – **Sun, 1 July 2009**

"One person who will not be throwing a welcome party for Jackson if he does eventually settle in Britain is his former fork-bending friend Uri Geller. 'I don't want to hear about Michael Jackson,' the entertainer said. The pair fell out over alleged anti-semitic remarks made by the singer… Geller admitted: 'I will never forgive him. I don't want to hear from Michael Jackson ever again.'" – **Express, 20 March 2006**

"Close friend Uri Geller said: 'I'm devastated and shocked. He was a young man, terribly fit and basically in good shape.'" – **Express, 26 June 2009**

"The horrifying state of pop superstar Michael Jackson in his final days can be revealed by the *Sun* today. Harrowing leaked autopsy details show the singer was a virtual skeleton… The examination showed the 5ft 10in star – once famed for his on-stage athleticism – had plunged to a 'severely emaciated' 8st 1oz [and] lost virtually all his hair." **Sun, 29 June 2009**

"He looks in incredible form strutting his stuff on stage – but two days later Michael Jackson was dead. These pictures are thought to be the last taken of the tragic superstar… as he pulls off an impressive high-energy routine. A source who watched Jacko's final rehearsal in LA said: 'Michael was in better form than for years.'" – **Sun, 30 June 2009**

Wanna be startin' something

"I'm starting with the man in the mirror; I'm asking him to change his ways… As the world digests the passing of Michael Jackson, the restaurant industry is also being asked to look inwardly and make a change on the controversial issue of service charges." – **Email from caterersearch.com**

"The recent tragic death of Michael Jackson has seen an outpouring of mixed emotions from around the world. Many have travelled to LA to leave tributes and messages of condolence… You too could pay your last respects to one of whom many would call the greatest music icons in the world by taking holidays by air to Los Angeles. Door2Tour.com offers a wide variety of holidays by air with nationwide pick-up points across the UK…" – **Marketing email**

"The world-famous Iowa State Fair butter cow will share the spotlight this year with a salute to the late Michael Jackson. Butter sculptor Sarah Pratt of West Des Moines plans to honor Jackson's extensive contributions to the music and dance industries through a butter sculpture of the pop icon." – **News release from Iowa State Fair**

What about us?

"EXCLUSIVE: Funeral Snub for buddy Bubbles… As the King of Pop is laid to rest in California, the ape will be kept 3,000 miles away. Bubbles will spend the day listening to 'calming flute music' at the animal sanctuary where he now lives. Centre staff have so far 'not said anything' to Bubbles about Jackson being dead." – **Sun, 2 July**

"Two tigers kept by Jackson were told of his death by their guardian, the former actress Tippi Hedren." – **London Lite, 2 July**

BROWN'S BRITAIN

A LIST of who has been bending the ear of financial services minister Lord Myners goes some way to explaining why the government's response to the financial crisis has been to make sure the financiers behind it aren't unduly inconvenienced.

Over recent weeks Myners and his boss Alistair Darling have rejected serious reform such as breaking up banks that are too big to fail or separating casino and retail banking. The only subject to have fired the passion of former-hedge fund chairman Myners is… protecting the hedge fund managers from European regulations.

"The industry shouldn't worry," he reassured former colleagues. "I am not going to let it go the same way as our coal communities." (Can collections and benefit gigs for the hedgies be far away?)

It might be hoped that Myners had at least come to his financier-friendly views after listening to all the arguments, including those of economists and commentators who favour something more radical. But a list of his meetings from January to March this year, released under the freedom of information act, reveals that he only talks to… financiers.

In January Myners was lobbied by: the **CBI** on "private equity issues"; "various representatives from the **hedge fund sector**" for a "catch up"; the new chairman of the **Alternative Investment Managers Association** (the hedge fund representative body); the **Asset Management Working Group** (fund managers); the **Investment Managers Association** (more fund managers); the **Institute of Directors**; the **Financial Services Global Competitiveness Group** (bankers) – twice; the **British Venture Capital Association** (private equity); and **KKR** (a private equity group).

By March it was the bankers' turn, Myners getting together with: a group of **bank chief executives**; **HSBC**; **Abbey**; **Nationwide** and the **FSGCG** (again). Apart from one meeting with ***Which?*** to discuss consumer issues, no alternative voice was invited in.

Small wonder that for all Treasury chief secretary Liam Byrne's talk of becoming "less reliant on financial services" as part of his "Building Britain's Future" plan, it's still the money men who get best looked after in Brown's Britain.

BUSINESS secretary Lord Mandelson clearly doesn't believe the bankers did anything wrong. For he has just handed the task of doling out £200m in social research grants to a banker who was responsible for multi-million-pound "impaired loans" which have been bailed out by the UK taxpayer.

In appointing Alan Gillespie to chair the Economic & Social Research Council (ESRC), Mandy has put him in charge of distributing grants to universities and directing important research into poverty, wages, the economy and other fundamental issues.

From 2001 to 2008 Gillespie chaired the Ulster Bank, which introduced risky practices to Ireland such as 100 percent mortgages, has around £390m of "impaired loans" and recently cut around 750 jobs. Now the property market has crashed, the British taxpayer is having to bail out loans made on Gillespie's watch because Ulster Bank is an RBS subsidiary.

Gillespie said he looked forward to "setting the agenda for policy-relevant research over the coming years" which is ironic given that his tenure at the Ulster Bank might itself make a good subject for policy-relevant research into irresponsible banking.

CALLED TO ORDURE ARSLIKHAN SPECIAL

SHORTLY after the election of John Bercow as speaker, a "humble address" was sent to the Queen by Commons leader Harriet Harman, pouring treacle over Bercow's predecessor Michael Martin "for his eminent services during the important period in which he presided with such distinguished ability and dignity in the chair of this House". This address was approved by the Commons "nemine contradicente" – presumably because MPs were too busy laughing at the unrecognisable description of useless Speaker Martin.

Brown-nosing has been rife in Westminster of late, with so many MPs trying to compliment the appalling Bercow – who got the job largely due to his own long campaign of Arslikhan – that he had to tell them to desist. You'd never have realised he was so widely hated (which he is, bitterly).

During Bercow's campaign for the chair, chronicled in *Eye* 1234, Labour women were a particular object of his energetic tonguing. But Tory women aren't safe from Bercow's sucky-sucky approach either. Take his recent encomium to so-soish frontbencher Cheryl Gillan (Chesham & Amersham). Candidate Bercow cooed: "I congratulate her on the way she spoke this morning – eloquently, sincerely, knowledgeably, movingly and with the legendary courtesy for which I think I can safely say she is renowned in all parts of this House."

That archaic, falsely daring "safely say" is classic Bercow. And how he loves the word "legendary". Only a few days ago, during some routine points of order, he turned to low-profile backbencher Oliver Heald (Con, NE Herts) and spoke of "the Hon Gentleman's legendary parliamentary dexterity". Legendary? Heald? Sometimes it is hard not to suspect that Bercow is being sarcastic. But then he needs to grease up to rank-and-file Tories now so they don't kick him out after the election. So there is method in his brown-nosing.

Bercow's shameless flattery of course worked, winning him the speakership even though he is clearly an oddball with a sharp temper. Flattery is what the House understands. So when you hear an outrageous bit of unearned praise, you can almost see MPs turning like connoisseurs to savour a piece of virtuoso insincerity.

Commons microphones recently caught Labour MP Diane Abbott making a loud slurping sound – she sounded like a dental nurse's suction tube – during a speech by Keith Vaz. At the time Vaz was making a greasy welcome to the new home secretary, Alan Johnson, saying "I am sure he will be a fantastic success". Johnson had trouble keeping a straight face. It's amazing we do not hear responses like Abbott's more often.

But at Westminster, the more sycophantic you are, the higher you rise. Look at the latest recruits to the government whips' office. Lyn Brown (East Ham) is a chaotic London Labour veteran. Why was she promoted? Well, she helped organise Gordon Broon's visit to east London two days after the local elections disaster, filling the hall with ardently pro-Gordon party members.

Mary Creagh (Wakefield) has also been made a whip – only a few weeks after telling the Commons a convoluted, earnest tale about how some constituents had had their lives transformed by the government's brilliant tax credits system. The way Creagh told it, it only needed the soundtrack of *Lassie Come Home* to become a major motion picture.

Also new to the whips is Kerry McCarthy (Bristol E), whose idea of a tough question on 16 March was to ask a Treasury minister about child poverty and say she hoped "we will do all we can to ensure that we meet our targets". Amazingly the minister agreed!

The only person who has worked harder for ministerial promotion is Tony Blair's successor in Sedgefield, Phil Wilson. When he now rises, the House braces itself for a risibly planted question. On 20 May it was to ask the prime minister about Tory "tax cuts". A few weeks before he wanted to know if Pa Broon was aware that some Tory had "talked down the future of Durham Tees Vallery airport". Back in November he quoted Nobel prize economist Paul Krugman's peachy view of Broon. Puke making.

It seems terribly cruel to make a man ask such odiously pointless questions and then not reward him with a minor ministerial plum. Perhaps Wilson should concentrate on trying to become the next Speaker.

'Gavel Basher'

JUNIOR health minister Ann Keen suffered a second embarrassment over expenses last month, on top of the little matter of the £137,679 she and her MP husband Alan claimed in second home allowance.

It has emerged that in 2005 she claimed £232 for treatment at the private Blackheath Hospital in south-east London on behalf of a member of her parliamentary staff. "As my member of staff had personal access to healthcare provided by the private sector... they chose to manage their care in this way," she said in a statement. "No rules were broken," of course, and anyway, doesn't everyone have Bupa these days?

And if a Labour health minister is unembarrassed about paying for private treatment, what about the hitherto unnamed patient? The *Eye* can reveal that it was Mrs Keen's former researcher and one-time Lewisham councillor, Simeon Baker, who now has a new job – extolling the benefits of the NHS as head of communications at Lewisham hospital!

WHO says the government is short of ideas? There were plenty of them last week in the "Building Britain's Future" manifesto.

As there were, in fact, in the last set of official policy announcements, in the budget two months ago, under the banner… "Building Britain's Future"

SOME Labour backbenchers reacted with open laughter to the parliamentary Labour party's choice of MPs to sit on the parliamentary reform committee set up by Gordon Brown to "change the way the Commons does business".

Nine vacancies to the committee were topped by Natascha Engel, one of the whips' favourites. Others making the cut included David Clelland, Clive Betts and Nick Palmer, all of whom can be relied on to toe the party line.

Those who failed to find favour in the election included notable dissenters Kelvin Hopkins, Mark Fisher, Paul Flynn, Andrew Mackinlay, Michael Meacher, Gordon Prentice, Lynne Jones and veteran fruitcake Austin Mitchell. Looks like the whips' payroll vote was busy...

EVEN as it exposed his expenses fiddle – claiming more than £50,000 to "rent" a London flat from his own company, BCC Marketing Services – the *Daily Telegraph* couldn't suppress a sigh of admiration for Brian Binley, Tory member for Northampton South.

"Unlike many politicians," it noted, "Brian Binley had a successful career as a businessman before being elected to parliament."

Er, up to a point. The *Telegraph* claimed that Binley and his wife set up BCC Marketing Services Ltd, which creates databases for cold-calling telemarketers, in 1989. But it failed to notice that this is not the same BCC Marketing Services that he runs today, and from which he "rented" the Pimlico flat.

The original company was put into liquidation on 6 May 2002 owing £300,000 to dozens of creditors, including more than £100,000 to the Inland Revenue and Customs. The very next day, Binley registered a new company, BCC Marketing Ltd. A month later, after the liquidator had changed the defunct company's name to Acre (2002) Ltd, Binley's new company adjusted its own moniker to the familiar BCC Marketing Services Ltd. Thus, within a few weeks of the failure of his company, Binley and his wife were able to restart their telesales business from the same Wellingborough address with a clean sheet, leaving the creditors behind them. They didn't even have to incur the expense of printing new writing paper.

Now, thanks to Binley's ingenuity, the selfsame BCC Marketing Services has taken more than £50,000 from the taxpayer. Smart work!

THE case of Mark France, the JobCentre worker facing disciplinary action over his involvement in a petition calling for his MP to quit, reveals a strange disparity in the way the civil service rules on political neutrality are applied.

France helped organise the "Julie Must Go" campaign calling for Bromsgrove MP Julie Kirkbride to resign over her and husband Andrew Mackay's second home expenses claims. Six thousand signatures were collected and both Kirkbride and Mackay are to stand down at the next election. However, France faces a hearing with his bosses this week and fears he may lose his job. As a front-desk member of staff, dealing with unemployed people coming into the JobCentre, France is on the very bottom rung of a civil service career in the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP). The DWP has told his local press that he is bound by the Civil Service Code to be impartial when representing his department.

In contrast, last year in Hastings, Child Support Agency worker Frank Swayne stood for election to the local council, for the BNP, to the horror of many colleagues. The feeble DWP response at the time was a statement that: "The DWP makes it clear to any member of staff standing for office that their political views and activities must not interfere with their work responsibilities." He was permitted to stand while remaining in his job.

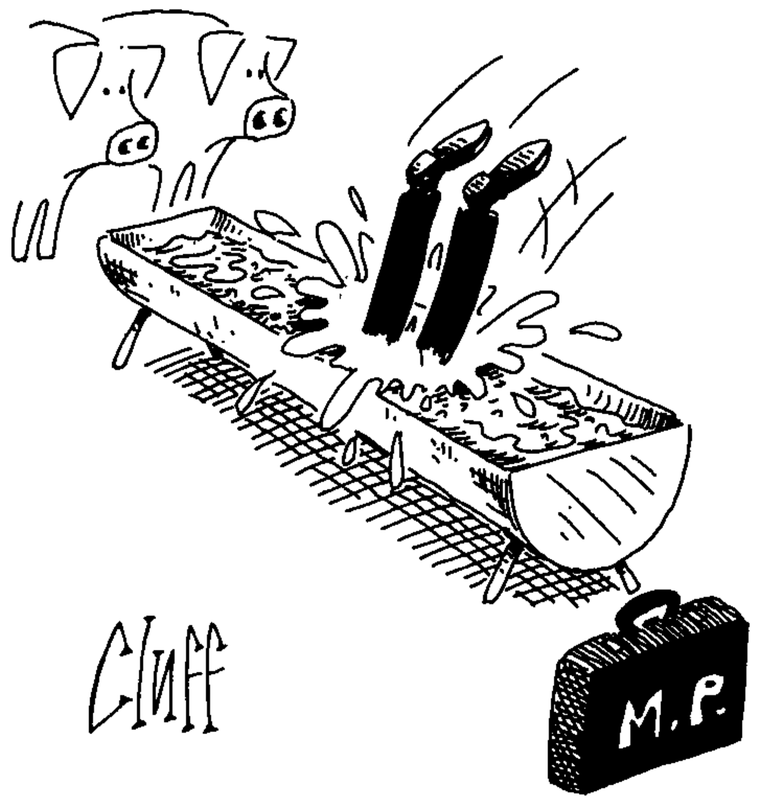
FORMER Labour minister Stephen Byers may have emerged as Gordon Brown's fiercest critic, but he has shown overt enthusiasm for another unpopular politician: a Ukrainian multimillionaire who helped him get a job.

Byers, when he's not too busy being MP for North Tyneside, chairs Yalta European Strategy, a campaign group founded and funded by Victor Pinchuk, a Ukrainian oligarch whose Interpipe group dominates Ukraine's steel industry.

Pinchuk is a controversial figure, the son-in-law of disgraced former Ukrainian premier Leonid Kuchma. He is even less politically popular than Brown, despite owning a great slice of Ukraine's media and other businesses. He has served in Ukraine's parliament but failed to be re-elected in 2006.

Yalta European Strategy campaigns specifically for Ukraine's entry into the EU, and in 2007 Pinchuk and Byers met with the latter's erstwhile colleague Peter Mandelson, when he was still EU trade commissioner, to discuss Pinchuk's plans for Ukraine–EU free trade.

Pinchuk also uses his cash to try to rebuild his political reputation, and Byers is not the only politician to have accepted his largesse. Last December it was revealed that Pinchuk gave more than $1m to Bill Clinton's foundation, Clinton addressing the Yalta European Strategy conference in 2007. Byers was then able to welcome his old mate Tony Blair to last year's conference.



SCHOOL FOR SCANDAL?

THE mysterious suspension and dismissal of the headmaster of a Gloucestershire grammar school could have significant political ramifications.

Roger Lock was fired six months after his suspension from Marling School, in Stroud. Parents and pupils, who protested outside the school gates about the loss of the headteacher, were only ever told that he faced a disciplinary hearing that was "not related to the welfare of children".

Ofsted inspectors found problems with the school's governance in 2007; and a new chair of governors, Neil Carmichael, was parachuted in by the Conservative local authority in 2008. Later that year, Mr Lock was suspended. Last month, just weeks after Mr Lock's dismissal, Mr Carmichael stepped down as chair of governors, prompting complaints that he was only ever brought in to get rid of the headteacher.

Stroud's Labour MP, David Drew, is a personal chum of Mr Lock and loyally raised his case in the House of Commons in April, pointing out that after 30 years at Marling, Mr Lock had no blemish on his record and had received no verbal warning, let alone a written warning, before being suspended. "The [Ofsted] report was critical of the governance of the school, but not of its management. It was therefore surprising that the head was suspended," he said.

Mr Lock is set to appeal against his dismissal. If the details of the case ever emerge, they could have an interesting impact at the general election. David Drew has a majority of just 350. His Tory opponent at the next election will be... one Neil Carmichael, former chair of governors of Marling School.

TENANTS EXTRA

BACK in February, *Eye* 1229 told how millions of council and housing association tenants were facing big rent increases in April. This was due to the government's formula for reviewing rents, arbitrarily based on the rate of inflation the previous September.

Because the retail prices index (RPI) briefly hit 5 percent in September 2008, even though it has since fallen to minus 1 percent, tenants would have faced average rises of 6.2 percent. In March, the then housing minister Margaret Beckett agreed to halve the proposed increases for council tenants to 3.1 percent. But more than 1m housing association tenants were forced to pay the full whack.

Since December, housing association (HA) tenants' rights have supposedly been looked after by the Tenants Services Authority (TSA), which took over responsibility for the regulation of HAs from the now defunct Housing Corporation. The TSA mission statement claims: "Our goal is to raise the standard of services for tenants." It raised no objection to the rises, however.

Come September 2009, should inflation remain negative, the rent-setting formula ought to lead to rent reductions for social housing tenants. But the chief executive of the TSA, Peter Marsh, has called on the government to examine scrapping the current system so rents can go up regardless of the RPI. What a champion!

ROT OFF THE PRESS

WHY would a respectable Labour MP grace Press TV, the Iranian regime's propaganda channel based in west London, with his presence?

Derek Wyatt, parliamentary private secretary to Foreign Office minister Lord Malloch Brown, has been one of the regulars lending an air of respectability to the mullahs' mouthpiece. But can he really agree with the line of Matthew Richardson, Press TV's legal adviser, who told the BBC World Service the recent election protests were "irresponsible"? Iran is a "young democracy, a rising democracy", Richardson explained unctuously. "We at Press TV want to show both sides of the story."

The station hasn't shown both sides of the murder of Neda Agha-Soltan, shot while heading to an opposition rally in Tehran, her last moments beamed around the world via YouTube.

The video caught her collapsing to the ground, and someone in the crowd shouting: "She has been shot! Someone come and take her!" The doctor who then tried to save her life, Arash Hejazi, has given a precise account of what happened. Members of the crowd pulled a man from his motorcycle, shouting: "We got him, we got him." They grabbed his identity card, which showed he was a member of Iran's Basij militia. "I didn't want to kill her," he shouted. The protesters let him go but kept the alleged killer's ID card and took photos of him.

That the militia had randomly executed a dissident was obvious to everyone... except Press TV. Far from acknowledging the evidence against its paymasters in Iran, the station muddied the waters. It quoted an Iranian police chief saying the killing was a "premeditated act of murder" – but not by a thug from the state militia, apparently. "Arash Hejazi, the doctor who witnessed Neda's death, is wanted by Iranian intelligence authorities and Interpol," Press TV quoted the police chief as saying. He "has given a completely false account of the incident to foreign media" and has connections to Britain.

The gun which killed Neda was, Press TV also reported, a "small-calibre pistol which is not used by Iranian security forces" and so must have come from abroad. Thus did the "unbiased" Press TV turn a good Samaritan into the prime suspect.

Foreign secretary David Miliband, after deploring the "continuing violence against those seeking to exercise the right of expression in Iran", may want to have words with Wyatt. But perhaps he shouldn't be too harsh on the MP for Sittingbourne and Sheppey, who is to stand down at the next election. The leaked MPs' expenses revealed that Wyatt had claimed 75p for two scotch eggs, £1.79 for five mini pork pies, £1.90 on an individual pork pie and £1,446 a month in interest for the mortgage on his Westminster home. To act as a commentator for the mouthpiece of a hostile power as well, he must be really down on his uppers.

'Ratbiter'

TV

Gerry's Big Decision (Channel 4) On Thin Ice (BBC2)

THE biggest loser in the television recession is drama – estimates suggest that output across the networks is down by more than 100 hours year on year. The reason for this is not only that plays and serials cost so much but also that execs have come to the conclusion that the main elements of fiction – tension and character – can be delivered far more cheaply by documentary.

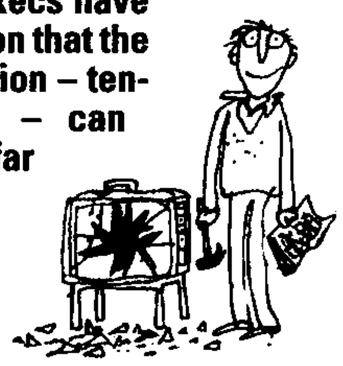
This has led to the stuffing of the schedules with reality TV (providing ready-made goodies and baddies without paying actors) and the frequent sight of the most egregious TV cliché of our time: the ludicrously delayed declaration of the final result on talent shows, as the camera slowly rests on each contestant.

But these low-rent cliffhangers increasingly influence factual programming. For example, **Gerry's Big Decision**, Channel 4's latest business show, sends Gerry Robinson, who began the downfall of ITV before improbably being reinvented as a presenter of upmarket financial shows on the channels he hadn't destroyed, to check out two recession-hit businesses with the promise that he will invest his own money in any setup that he considers worth saving: "All over Britain, companies are going bust… but now one man wants to help."

The dimmest student on day one of the media studies course at the newest of the new universities could see that this format is *Dragons' Den* crossed with *The Apprentice*: as if to underline the debt to the latter, the commentary carefully calls the presenter "Sir Gerry" throughout. The shots of him being driven around in a chauffeured limo and walking the dogs on the rolling lawns of his Irish country pile are also standard-issue telly tycoon willy-waving.

Another terrible modern telly tic is the assumption that the audience has uniformly been stricken with short-term memory loss.

After each of the commercial breaks – which sometimes arrive after only eight minutes – the voiceover summarises events in identical phrases. A clip of one beer company employee complaining that his boss's "management skills are non-existent" was played three times in the first 20 minutes, presumably to seed the inevitable joke about how this man couldn't organise a piss-up in a brewery.



Less expectedly, there's also a fair bit of *Wife Swap* in the mix as the two breweries Sir Gerry considers for his largesse are both run by couples. It will be no surprise to viewers of the genre that Gerry's tactic is divide-and-rule.

But the point is the cheap dramatic tension. Although it was clear early on that only one of the companies had any hope, Sir Gerry gamely agonised in the back of his car before laboriously announcing his decision. Both the lucky and unlucky participants wept, which counts as the ideal result in this kind of show. Bored and manipulated viewers, though, are left feeling that Channel 4 is desperately in need of some advice on running its business – although probably not from Sir Gerry, given what happened at ITV.

On Thin Ice, BBC2's much publicised Antarctic adventure, is another example of documentary's crass obsession with dramatic cliffhangers. The show follows Olympian James Cracknell and reality TV alumnus Ben Fogle as they train for and then compete in a sub-zero polar race with a third team member who, in the opening episode, is frequently held out to be the actor Jonny Lee Miller.

In the desperate interests of keeping viewers watching, the series keeps emphasising the terrible risk the contestants are taking – "they risk serious injury… even death", "if they cannot be evacuated… they may even perish" and so on.

Surely, though, viewers are now easily sophisticated enough to know that, if anything had happened to the participants, the series would not be shown or, at least, not without elaborate advance publicity of the kind that would attend the release of footage of Michael Jackson's final rehearsal. And indeed – in an age of such elaborate coverage of even minor celebrities in newspapers and on Facebook and Twitter – a large proportion of the target audience will already know all the carefully disguised twists in the series: Miller dropping out and Fogle going down with a flesh-eating illness.

But, regardless of the extent to which this information is in the public domain, the show offers finger-biting commentary on whether or not Miller will make the final cut. And, rather unfortunately given the current scrutiny of BBC use of the licence fee, Cracknell and Fogle are shown at one point flying out to Los Angeles with a crew in order to clarify an ambiguity in one of Miller's emails.

Although broadcasters make great play of how they have adapted to new technology, shows such as *On Thin Ice* reveal the extent to which they haven't understood that the game has changed. Even a decade ago, it would have been possible to maintain the tension of a documentary over six weeks. Now anyone can Google the outcome before transmission even begins. It just shows that one of the many advantages of fictional drama over dramatic documentary is that viewers are less likely to greet the twists with yawns or boredom.

'Remote Controller'

6TH FLOOR
MARK THOMPSON D.G
TELEVISION CENTRE
THE BBC HAS BEEN ACCUSED OF ENCOURAGING THE PUBLIC TO SWEAR …
9 O'clock Watershed

MEDIA NEWS

COULD the furore surrounding MPs' expenses have given ITV chiefs a novel idea about how to force out middle-aged – and expensive – women TV presenters?

Last month Lisa Aziz, co-presenter of ITV's *West Country Tonight*, went to what she thought was to be a meeting to discuss edits to a news feature on terrorism, only to find herself accused of fiddling her expenses.

Ever since Aziz, 47, arrived from Sky News in 2005, it was accepted that as the main presenter she was entitled to claim for hair, beauty and dry-cleaning costs. No claim had been refused or challenged – until the meeting. In one of seven allegations involving relatively piffling sums, she is accused of wrongly claiming £5.75 for dry-cleaning a child's top last February. (She has since had to get a statement from the cleaners, confirming it was her own.)

Aziz is now off sick and has lodged a formal grievance. She is also claiming ITV breached its own employment procedures by ambushing her and giving her no proper chance to respond to the allegations.

In the meantime, she was suspended pending charges of gross misconduct and her place on the presenting couch taken by her two younger blonde deputies, Claire Manning and Ellie Barker. Insiders say it is no coincidence that Aziz, protected by her contract, was the only expensive (around £150,000 a year), ageing, single mother who had survived the swingeing cuts which followed the merger in February of two ITV West Country regions, when half the staff lost their jobs. M'learned friends are rubbing their hands.

LISA AZIZ isn't the only ITV employee to feel the squeeze of its expenses-tightening.

New directives come through on the Watercooler, the company's intranet system, just about every week. If employees don't file claims within 60 days, they can't have them; and complex rules have been put in place on mileage claims. Taxis can no longer be pre-booked; instead, employees must hail black taxis – an alarming prospect for anyone working in a remote location late at night.

The most recent diktat is particularly uplifting. "All claims will have to be for over £30," the Watercooler announced, "unless you are leaving the business and it is your final claim." So, if you're one of the 600 staff ITV is laying off, you'll be allowed to claim for less than 30 quid. Trebles all round!

***EYE* reader Paul Mendelson writes to ask if, following the untimely demise of Michael Jackson, there is not a Gnomic "Curse of Bashir" at work?**

Concerned that the subjects of Martin Bashir interviews tend not to fare too well after granting the grand inquisitor an audience (Princess Diana; George Best; a soon-to-be-jailed Lord Archole, etc), his radical suggestion as to how to break the curse is… a Bashir autobiography!

DUMB BRITAIN

The Weakest Link, BBC1
Anne Robinson: Which South American country did cartoon character Homer Simpson mispronounce as "You are gay"?
Contestant: Bolivia.

Divided, ITV
Andrew Castle: In English, how many countries of the world have a name beginning with Q? None, one or two?
Contestant 1: Quebec?
Contestant 2: Yeah, Quebec. That's in South America, isn't it. Definitely Quebec.

BBC Radio 1
Chris Moyles: Who's the only original cast member on EastEnders?
Caller *(after some thought)*: Is it Rolf Harris?

SO what does Mark Byford, beneficiary of the biggest public sector pension pot in the UK at £8m and rising, do to earn such a wedge of our money?

He is, of course, deputy director-general of the BBC, having lost out on the top job in 2004 to Mark Thompson. Thompson compensated him for his disappointment by appointing him head of all journalism at the corporation – a mere three months after Byford had announced that "the notion of exclusive here, exclusive there, exclusive everywhere is not appropriate for the BBC".

Byford put his money where his mouth was the following year when he insisted on sitting on a scoop about the attorney general's advice on the legality of the Iraq war and not telling any programme editors about it until *Channel 4 News* had already broken the story.

As acting D-G after the departure of Greg Dyke, he was responsible for issuing a grovelling apology to the government in the wake of the Hutton inquiry, and for overseeing an internal investigation which outraged staff likened to a Guantanamo tribunal. He was also responsible for investigating comments made by John Humphrys in extra-curricular after-dinner speeches, which he concluded "could be used to call his impartiality into question" – much to the delight of the Murdoch-owned *Times* and Number 10 press office who had cooked the story up between them in the first place.

Byford also served as head of the World Service after his former boss John Birt obligingly shunted Sam Younger out of the job for him, feeling that his protégé was still "one job short" of the director-generalship that would become vacant on his retirement.

He currently chairs the "editorial standards board" of the BBC and was one of the first members of staff to undergo the compulsory "safeguarding trust" course following the fakery scandals two years ago. He also heads the "complaints management board", and was happy to announce in 2005 that "79 percent of all complaints have been dealt with within the 10-day target period at Stage One while 93 percent of all those handled within the programme division have met the ten-day response target," a sentence which shows how eminently qualified he is to sit on Thompson's "executive direction group".

The corporation defends the pay of its executives on the grounds that it must compete for top talent with the commercial sector – "in many cases, a tiny patch on what other broadcasters pay", as Thompson put it last year. It goes without saying that Byford has never worked anywhere other than the BBC since he graduated in 1979.

Since it was Byford who recently negotiated the "memorandum of understanding" with ITV to share facilities and footage so that the commercial channel could continue producing any regional news at all, he can hardly be under any illusion that rival broadcasters still have any cash in the kitty. Besides, as unkind colleagues point out, Channel 4 and Sky seem to struggle on without a deputy director-general.

Eager to help out, however, *Newsnight* editor Peter Rippon this week offered Byford the chance to prove his worth: a series of films in which the D-DG would put himself about in the real world, trying to see if he could get a better deal outside the corporation. Sadly, the offer was declined. Byford, it seems, has no room in his schedule. He's too busy doing… whatever it is he does all day.

THE MBE for "services to the arts" awarded to Dotun Adebayo, presenter of BBC Radio Five Live's *Up All Night*, prompted hoots of derision from the editors and producers who over the years have spent many hours, er, assisting Adebayo with his scripts to make them fit for broadcast.

Nevertheless, the most two-faced among them still felt able to toast Adebayo's success with lashings of champagne at licencepayers' expense.

AD NAUSEAM

WHEN Twiggy was unveiled as the new face of Olay's anti-ageing skincare range last week, Proctor & Gamble's press department went in to overdrive revealing how the 59-year-old had returned to the fold 25 years after she last starred in ads for the brand, then called Oil of Ulay.

There was no mention, however, of what she's been up to in the interim; and those who value the model's opinions on face cream might recall that so devoted to Olay was the Twig (when they weren't paying her), she launched her own rival brand.

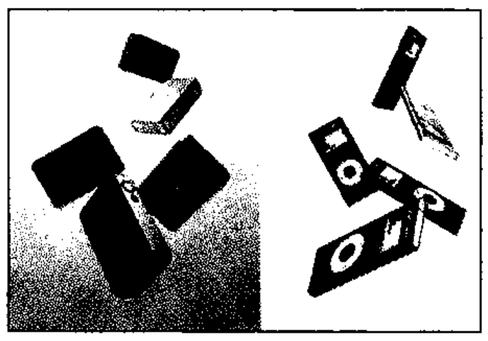
Twiggy Skincare exploded into the national consciousness on the QVC shopping channel in 2000, sold through Asda for a few years, and claimed to be "100% Twiggy tested". Alas, the public cared not a jot and come 2004 it had disappeared from shelves. The site www.twiggyskincare.co.uk is now vacant.

PS: On the day Olay announced its signing of Twiggy to promote anti-ageing creams, it was hit with a ban from the Advertising Standards Authority for misleading advertising – of anti-ageing creams!

BIG news in the global petrochemicals industry with the announcement of a joint venture between Russian gas giant Gazprom and the Nigerian firm NNPC.

The new company is to be called, er, Nigaz. Just the way to win friends in new markets.

APPLE TURNOVER?



Sony's Cybershot camera may be 'like.no. other'… but its advertising campaign certainly is

COULD it be farewell to internet snooping firm Phorm, whose shares fell 40 percent at the news that top potential customer BT has "no immediate plans" to use its products for targeted advertising online?

BT was in cahoots with Phorm, openly trialling the Webwise system this year after previous secret trials monitoring BT customers (which led to an investigation by the European Commission – see *Eyes passim*). With Virgin Media also announcing no immediate plans to use Phorm and no commitment from TalkTalk, Phorm isn't doing too well in the UK. Things aren't looking much brighter in the US, where the Federal Trade Commission has now threatened to step in unless the ad industry controls how online advertisers collect and use personal data.

GOING LIVE

"I THINK there's a lot of Michael Jackson fans here," BBC News's Rajesh Mirchandani revealed with a blinding flash of insight as he mingled with the crowds who had gathered outside the hospital where Wacko's body had been taken.

"Sir, you're live on Sky News. Why have you come here tonight?" asked Sky's Kay Burley from outside the Jackson home. "Well, I live just down the street," replied a startled "fan".

Meanwhile back at the BBC, a live link to Jeremy Bowen found the BBC's Middle East editor in the BBC office in Tehran hiding from the Iranian authorities, following the arrest of British embassy staff. "So do we know any more about the fate of the nine people arrested?" he was asked.

"No," said Bowen before the BBC News Channel returned to blanket coverage of Michael Jackson's death.

For overkill in the having-nothing-to-say stakes, BBC Radio Five Live got up extra early last Friday for the seven-hour warm-up before the men's singles semi-finals at Wimbledon.

Sheelagh Fogarty: "So is the atmosphere building there?" Reporter: "Well, we're here, so is BBC *Breakfast* and Radio 1, so you could say it is drawing the media focus."

MUSIC & MUSICIANS

BACK in November this column pointed out the lunacy of the Royal Opera's plan to spend £100m of public money turning Manchester's Palace Theatre into a permanent northern outpost for its Covent Garden shows (*Eye* 1223).

We said the idea was self-serving, stupidly expensive and simply a rehash of a hopeless idea first mooted 20 years ago and then rejected. Now the arts establishment of Manchester and Salford has spoken and made it clear the scheme is neither wanted, needed nor acceptable.

The chief executive of the Lowry Arts Centre, built only eight years ago at a cost to the public of £116m, has written to Ben Bradshaw, the new culture secretary, to say the scheme should be scrapped as it would threaten the Lowry's continued viability. More bluntly, the chair of the Lowry trustees has said the whole idea would be "bad for Manchester, bad for the arts, and bad for the taxpayer".

Given this hostility, and an Arts Council England report that also declares the scheme "not viable", you'd think this would end the matter. But no. Bizarrely, Tony Hall, Royal Opera's CEO, is "disappointed" with Manchester's lack of enthusiasm but wants to press on regardless. Clearly Hall has either lost his marbles or the plot… or is about to lose his head.

'Lunchtime O'Boulez'

SUPERMODELS

KERBER

CINEMA
BRUNO
I THINK IT'S PATHETIC THE WAY HE PRANCES AROUND IN SILLY OUTFITS, MAKING US FASHION PEOPLE LOOK RIDICULOUS!!!
YEAH!
ANYWAY DARLING… MUST TOODLE!
BYE SWEETIE!

MEDICINE BALLS

Has Bristol learned from Bristol?

HOW much has the safety culture at University Hospitals Bristol (UHB) changed since the public inquiry into cardiac surgery?

On the plus side, when the *Eye* broke the heart scandal in 1992, it took seven years to announce an external inquiry. When allegations of serious histopathology errors were published last month (*Eye* 1238), it took seven days. There's even a web page dedicated to the histopathology review (www.uhbristol.nhs.uk/histopathology-review-june-2009).

But there's still plenty of "old" Bristol. Too much power concentrated in too few hands; very serious allegations not shared with the trust board; arrogance and bullying; a shortage of specialist staff; an ineffectual royal college; and a few consultants who raised concerns but were not taken seriously. And once again, many doctors, managers and establishment figures have been well aware of the problems for some years, but virtually no patients.

The UHB website says the review was ordered after "15 potential cases of histopathology misdiagnosis" were published in "the satirical magazine *Private Eye*". But the trust knows that there are far more than 15 alleged errors dating back from 2000 – these are just a sample of the errors collated by a single consultant where significant harm to patients had occurred. There are other examples where harm was fortuitously averted. Other consultants have also raised concerns specifically in four areas (respiratory, breast, skin and gynaecology), some as far back as 2004.

Other allegations that have been explicitly made to the UHB medical director Dr Jonathan Sheffield or the chief executive Dr Graham Rich since 2007 include:

1. UHB pathologists not routinely sending difficult slides for an outside opinion.

2. Diagnostic errors and omissions in gynaecology reporting picked up by a specialist pathologist over a two-year period with "serious implications for patient safety". The more serious errors were confirmed by an external expert.

3. Attitudes of hostility and denial when the above concerns were raised, and a smearing of the specialists who raised them.

4. Coroners' reports performed to a substandard level by UHB pathologists but no action taken.

5. Deficiencies in the UHB pathology audit.

Dr Sheffield, himself a histopathologist, has frequently met and exchanged correspondence with those raising concerns, but to no satisfactory resolution. In July 2008, the minutes of the Medical Advisory Committee at North Bristol Trust (NBT) state that there "continued to be serious cases of respiratory misdiagnosis by UHB histopathologists of specimens from NBT patients, despite there having been assurances by UHB that the problems had been overcome", and that "UHB continued to refuse to allow slides to be looked at by NBT histopathologists".

Dr Martin Morse, NBT medical director at the time, said that unless an external review was arranged, he would report the matter to the Healthcare Commission. In August 2008, Rich gave a written assurance that an external review had been requested. It never happened. The Royal College of Pathologists was contacted but claims it never received the formal agreement of both trusts to do the review. And without an invitation, the royal college is powerless to intervene even if serious misdiagnosis is occurring.

Forced into action by the *Eye*, UHB has organised its own external review using a private company called Medical Solutions, which already does the trust's breast cancer receptor testing and thus has a financial stake in one of the four areas of concern. Hardly independent. 3,500 slides across the entire pathology service are going to be chosen at random for one year (2007) to see if there is a significant error rate. If UHB had a proper prospective audit, it would already know what its error rate is for subspecialties and pathologists. The random selection will not include any errors prior to 2007 and, according to one statistician, "is fraught with methodological problems and extremely unlikely to get to the heart of the problem".

Specialist pathology is not simply making a diagnosis of, say, benign or malignant, but also recognising other features of the tissue that should guide very complex treatment in discussion with the entire team. There is a national shortage of specialist pathologists, and Bristol can only provide a safe service by merging the expertise of its two trusts. As one senior consultant at NHS Bristol put it: "We've been trying to do this ever since I arrived in Bristol 25 years ago."

The external review is looking for the wrong problem in the wrong place. It's changing the culture and service afterwards that matters. Time to grow up and get on with it.

M.D.

ECO GNOMICS

Forest chumps

THANKS to continued demand from British buyers of paper and palm oil, a rapacious Asian company is continuing to make big profits from deforestation.

Sinar Mas Group, one of the largest conglomerates in Asia, owns Asia Pulp & Paper (APP), which is one of the most aggressive leaders in the race to denude Indonesian rainforests.

APP has long been attacked for its treatment of the environment, so news that it is to lead a massive new logging scheme in which 124,000 acres of forest will be felled on the island of Sumatra, came as little surprise to environmentalists. The project threatens the last remaining patch of untouched forest near the Bukit Tigapuluh National Park and a critically endangered species of great ape in the area. Orang-utans, Sumatran tigers and elephants also depend on this crucial ecosystem.

APP was quick to issue a defensive statement, hiding behind the usual social development and employment benefits of its operations, and stating that its plans comply with Indonesian law (which is woefully inadequate on forest protection). Hilariously, it called on "stakeholders" to be measured in their response and claimed that by creating biological corridors in the park, habitat would actually be enhanced not threatened.

Anyone who has followed APP's trail of devastation over the years will recognize the pattern. Groups like WWF, who had been trying to help APP improve its behaviour, will no longer deal with the company. The Forest Stewardship Council, which certifies well-managed forests, terminated a contract with APP two years ago when the company failed to honour promises. One conservationist flew over APP controlled areas last month and said the picture was even worse than he had feared.

Sinar Mas Group has also led the expansion of Indonesia's palm oil industry. Indonesia aims to expand these plantations from 16m acres to almost 26m by 2015. Scientists say that if deforestation continues at the present rate, 98 percent of Indonesia's forest will be degraded or gone by 2022. No one is more aware of this than Sinar Mas, and conservationists now fear the company is moving further afield, buying up licences in Papua New Guinea. Attempts to get customers of the Sinar Mas Group like Unilever to boycott its products have so far been unsuccessful. Perhaps this new crisis will persuade them.

SIGNAL FAILURES

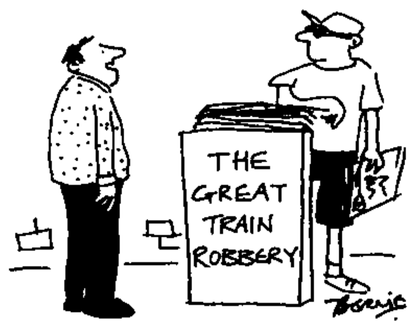
De fault's all yours, Adonis

THE government *still* doesn't understand that rail franchises are pointless and damaging – despite the second collapse of an east-coast franchise in just three years. Millions more pounds will be spent on another east-coast franchise contest, so Labour can renege to the last on its pre-1997 promise of a "publicly owned" railway.

National Express East Coast (NXEC) and its GNER predecessor both undermined the business with desperate measures to save their franchises. Other franchisees are doing whatever they can to maintain short-term profits and share prices, helping Britain and the rail industry through the recession being irrelevant.

NXEC's collapse drops another drawback of franchising on the desks of ministers who were adamant that any parent group that defaults on one franchise will lose its other franchises – to stop big plcs dumping loss-making franchises while keeping profitable ones. "The department has the power to cross-default franchise operators," rail minister Andrew Adonis declared in May.

But when National Express Group signalled default on NXEC last week, Adonis (now transport secretary) didn't strip it of its c2c or East Anglia franchises. "The government believes it may have grounds to terminate these franchises," was all he muttered – after NEG said it had "clear and detailed advice from leading counsel upon its, and its subsidiaries', position… and is confident that the implication of any NXEC default should be confined to the NXEC franchise."



"Biggs or National Express?"

If the government fights, lawyers will make even more money from rail privatisation. If the government loses or backs out, other plcs could selectively hand back keys, or threaten to.

"It is simply unacceptable to reap the benefits of contracts when times are good, only to walk away from them when times become more challenging," Adonis moaned. Yes; but that's his government's fault for continuing a system famous for richly rewarding private firms while leaving financial risk with the state. Even now, Labour will cut other spending (last week northern transport bosses were infuriated by a 42 percent cut in promised extra carriages) rather than stop wasting money on franchising.

Despite ruling out bailouts, the government has now – inevitably – bailed out NEG, depriving taxpayers of NEG's promised east-coast franchise payments, while NEG continues sucking profits from other franchises. When will it stop giving private companies arrows to shoot at taxpayers?

WHEN Richard Bowker became NEG's chief executive less than three years ago, he dismissed claims by former GNER boss Christopher Garnett that firms could get into trouble by overpaying for franchises.

"I rather discount comments from people who have not done terribly well," Bowker responded. He clearly saw himself as a success, despite the troubles of the short-lived Strategic Rail Authority under his leadership (Eyes passim). He didn't even last a year in his next post, at Partnerships for Schools (*Eye* 1160).

Had he not discounted Garnett's advice, NEG wouldn't have offered and failed to pay the government even more for the east-coast franchise than GNER offered and failed to pay. Bowker's brief leadership also saw NEG pay over the odds for a Spanish coach firm in 2007. NEG recently had to beg bankers for more leeway on its huge debt and now faces takeover bids or dismemberment – time for another sharp exit by Bowker. Many in Britain will wish him a much longer stay in his new job, in the Middle East.

'Dr B Ching'

ROTTEN BOROUGHS

THOSE PHOBIAS IN FULL

"FILTH. Racist, Islamophobic, homophobic filth." That was the verdict of Tower Hamlets leader Lutfur Rahman on recent *Eye* stories about his council, delivered to a Labour party meeting in the east London borough.

As predicted in *Eye* 1238, chief executive Martin Smith, who had displeased Lutfur and his cronies by insisting that the council should serve every citizen of the borough rather than only the male, middle-aged Bangladeshi ones, is going to take the money – at least £250,000 – and slope off. He has done nothing wrong and should easily walk into another senior job. In a statement announcing Smith's departure, Lutfur praised his "great dedication, commitment and integrity" and fantastic work for the borough – so, naturally, it was "an appropriate time for him to move on"!

Meanwhile the clock is ticking for Lutfur's regime, with the local party's membership department in "special measures" and the process for selecting candidates taken over by the regional Labour party, which has woken up to the influence of the East London Mosque and the Saudi-backed Islamic Forum of Europe on the council leadership.

If anything, religion perhaps matters less in Tower Hamlets, a borough with a £1bn budget, than a very inward-looking style of Bangladeshi politics in which blocks of votes are delivered according to which village back home the head of an extended family comes from. If Lutfur and his chums are deselected by Labour, they may just go off and join Respect. It's as principled as that.

● EVEN council chief execs with far weaker records than Martin Smith seem to have no difficulty finding new jobs.

When Jeanette McGarry was given the heave-ho from East Staffordshire borough council in December, after just nine months, it cost taxpayers more than £130,000 to pay her off. She had been suspended over allegations of "misconduct", details of which have never been revealed. She went with three months' pay in lieu of notice and 10 months as "compensation for loss of office". Now she has resurfaced in Stoke-on-Trent as £120,000 director of housing, environment and neighbourhood services. Ain't life grand?

BUCKS FIZZLE

TROUBLES continue for Southwest One (SWO), the useless outsourcing project costing council taxpayers more than £600m over 10 years.

Somerset council's operations have been so messed up by the failure of SAP, the IT system at the heart of the venture, that it has given its partner IBM until the end of July to get it working properly. Otherwise, staff have been promised, it will be "unplugged". Not before time, say those working weekends to keep up with the council's backlog of unpaid bills.

Councillors in Buckinghamshire, about to embark on a similar project, would do well to take note. Bucks CC, the fire service and three district councils are joining forces in "Pathfinder", a 10-year contract worth up to £700m which will be awarded next year. Other authorities in the south east who are being encouraged to sign up may also like to look at the past performance of the Pathfinder project's director, Susan Barnes, who held the same role for SWO in Taunton.

In 2007, at a sensitive stage in negotiations between Somerset CC and the three bidders for the SWO contract – IBM, BT and Crapita – Barnes travelled to London for a secret six-hour meeting with IBM executives. According to a statement by her superior, resources director Roger Kershaw, she had called in sick so she could meet IBM, which was allegedly considering pulling out of negotiations. As a result, Kershaw wrote: "It has seriously undermined my working relationship with her and the trust that I can place in her. I have as per her contract given her the three months required notice."

But Kershaw and his boss, Somerset chief executive Alan Jones, have never explained why, if Barnes was given three months' notice in February 2007, she was still in her post at the start of September that year, when Somerset decided to sign up with, er, IBM.

No doubt the experience gave her a valuable insight into outsourcing deals in local government. As it has done to her husband, Colin Port (*Eyes passim*), chief constable of Avon & Somerset police, who sits on the board of Southwest One. Hopefully no questions of conflict of interest will arise if Bucks also eventually opts for IBM.

● EMBARRASSMENT for Richmond council as it blunders on with plans for Countryside Properties, the *Eye*'s favourite developer, to build luxury flats on a vacant site beside the Thames at Twickenham, very much against the wishes of locals (*Eye* 1239).

After the council ignored the results of its own half-hearted consultation, residents organised their own referendum, conducted by Electoral Reform Services, which asked the 4,090 electors of St Mary's parish: "Should public land on Twickenham Riverside be sold to a property development company?" Out of 1,928 votes cast – a turnout of 47.1 percent – 1,785 (93.5 percent) said no and 125 (6.5 percent) said yes.

Lib Dem council leader "Blue" Serge Lourie has democratically pledged to ignore the referendum's finding. Sainted Twickenham MP Vince Cable, attempting to sit on the fence while saying nothing meaningful, looks more uncomfortable by the day.

FRIENDS REUNITED

A NEW BROOM joins the children's services department on the Isle of Wight with the appointment of Deborah Cameron as temporary deputy director on £750 a day, three days a week.

Hailing Ms Cameron as having "significant experience at high level management", her employers omit to explain that that experience included being in charge of the London borough of Newham's social services 10 years ago, when a review by the Social Services Inspectorate and the Audit Commission found her department to be woefully inadequate. "Children's services are of particular concern," the report stated.

Risks to young people, Ms Cameron's primary area of responsibility on the Isle of Wight, were said not to have been identified quickly or managed properly. Newham's chief executive at the time, Dave Burbage (*Eyes passim*), felt the findings were "harsh", but said the council accepted them in full.

Ms Cameron took "early retirement" before the damning report was published. She then worked in a number of short-term social work jobs, followed by a spell as chief executive of a substance abuse charity, Addaction. IoW's decision to hire her was helped by an "excellent" reference from the council's finance director – the very same Dave Burbage who was her boss at Newham. Just fancy that.

● THE Audit Commission is to investigate the distribution of £675,000 of Youth Opportunity Fund (Yof) money allocated to Bradford city council from 2006 to 2008. The commission has received complaints from a youth charity, North of England Activities and Training (Neat), whose bids for Yof money were repeatedly turned down by the council because there was "too much emphasis on buying minibuses with disabled access". Bloody disabled yoof!

Neat then discovered that more than £220,000 of Yof money had been spent on two "youth cafes" which turned out to be... council-owned buildings in need of refurbishment. Neat indeed.

"Under new Health and Safety regulations, the following races have been banned..."

HIGHLAND SLING

BAD news for Highland council in Scotland, where a decision by Royal Mail will add £78,000 to the council's transport bill this year.

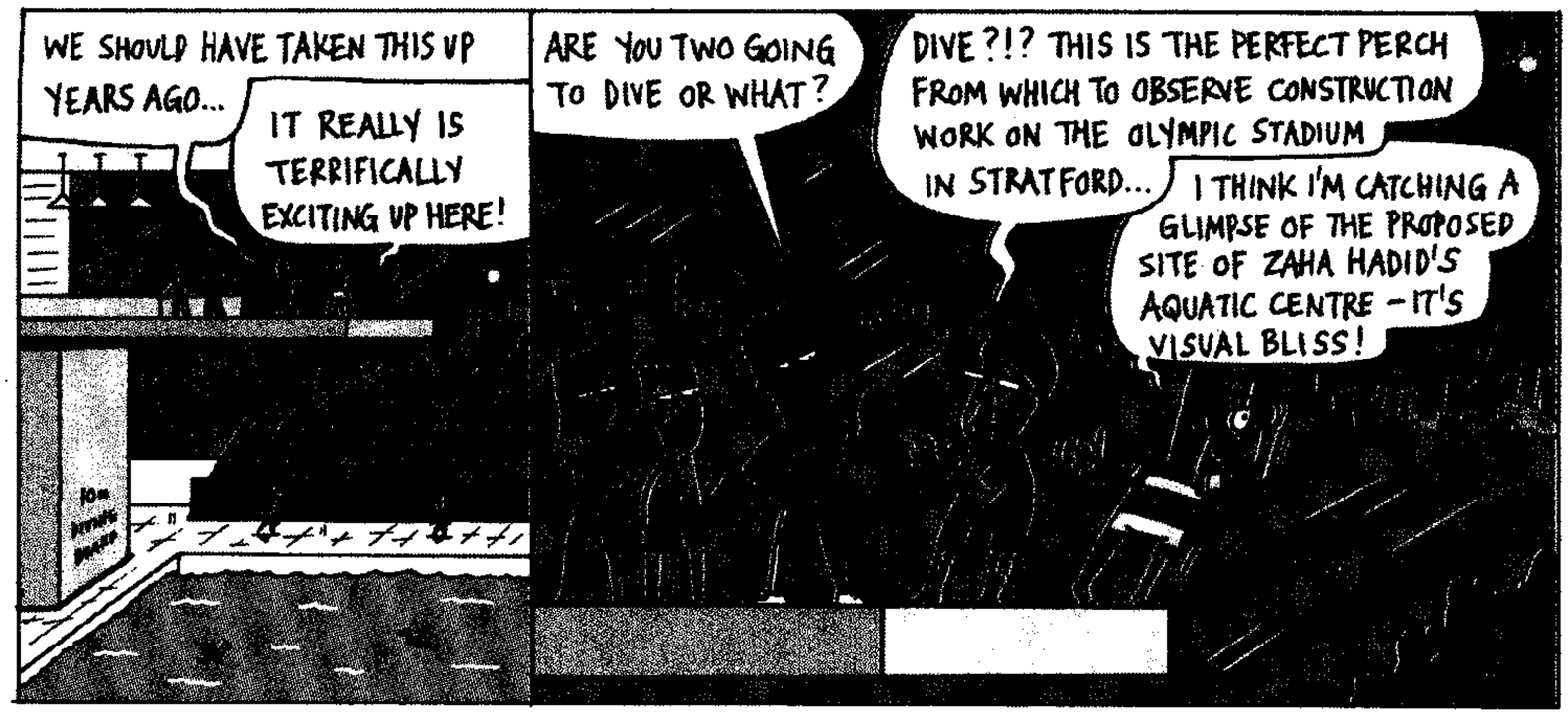
For decades Royal Mail has carried passengers in remote areas using post buses – vans with a few passenger seats. As the vans were doing the rounds anyway, having them double up as basic public transport made sense; but commonsense counts for little when Royal Mail is looking for "efficiency" savings.

Highland council expected to give Royal Mail £35,000 this year to operate the buses. But when Royal Mail insisted on culling them, the council had to lay on alternatives. One service alone, for Applecross and Torridon, needs an estimated £33,000 annual subsidy. The result of Royal Mail's actions is a 223 percent rise in the council's spending on equivalent transport – at a time when the public sector is supposed to be counting every penny.

The council says the new arrangements "may not be sustainable" and that it's looking for "compensatory savings" this year. So much for joined-up government in a recession.

IT'S GRIM UP NORTH LONDON

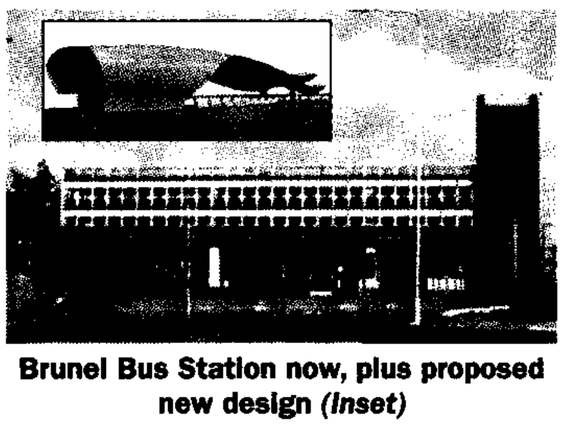
KNIFE & PACKER


WE SHOULD HAVE TAKEN THIS UP YEARS AGO...
IT REALLY IS TERRIFICALLY EXCITING UP HERE!
ARE YOU TWO GOING TO DIVE OR WHAT?
DIVE?!? THIS IS THE PERFECT PERCH FROM WHICH TO OBSERVE CONSTRUCTION WORK ON THE OLYMPIC STADIUM IN STRATFORD...
I THINK I'M CATCHING A GLIMPSE OF THE PROPOSED SITE OF ZAHA HADID'S AQUATIC CENTRE - IT'S VISUAL BLISS!
10m

NOOKS and CORNERS

"COME *friendly bombs...*" Slough today looks rather different from the town made notorious since the 1930s by John Betjeman's poem. Whether it has been improved is a matter of opinion; but Slough council's plan to redevelop the town centre – at a time of severe economic difficulty – suggests councillors may have taken leave of their senses.

"Mess up the mess they call a town..." I discussed the proposal to demolish the Town Hall, a fine, proud statement of 1933-37, in *Eye* 1211. The idea of destroying what is arguably one of the best buildings in Slough met strong local opposition, and English Heritage has recommended it for listing. Undaunted, the council is now pressing ahead with its £400m "Heart of Slough" regeneration which involves pulling down three libraries, a university campus and the bus station and replacing them with 34,000 square metres of speculative office space and 1,500 new homes. Why?



Brunel Bus Station now, plus proposed new design (*Inset*)

The "Heart of Slough" masterplan was initiated by the council in 2006. It is supported by English Partnerships, "The National Regeneration Agency" with £17.52m, and also by the Homes & Communities Agency, with more public money. Slough, says the council, is "one of the most culturally and ethnically diverse towns in the UK" and "building a positive image is essential in maintaining Slough's position as a primary regional node".

The council hopes to enhance the existing urban roundabout south of the railway station with a "mixed-use complex of world-class multi-functional buildings, visual landmarks [what other sort are there?] and an outstanding public space". This last will be an elevated central piazza over the roundabout with an open-air amphitheatre and a "flagship building", the "Creative Hub": "an international and national focus for creative industries, performance, visual and digital art and screen based media..."

This has yet to be designed, but another "learning magnet" is the proposed new public library to be designed by 3DReid architects. This curved building with (of course) a vast glass wall and silly oversailing roof will replace not one but three existing library buildings: the former Public Library, neo-Georgian of 1936; the Robert Taylor Library of 1973-74 by Fred Pooley, which the revised *Buildings of England* volume for Bucks thought "the most sophisticated building in the town centre, excellently fulfilling its purpose"; and the library of Thames Valley University, which is closing its Slough campus. This last building, completed in 1966 at a cost of £3.4m, was designed by the firm of Richard Rogers – not this column's favourite architect; but it seems a waste as well as stupid to destroy so recent a structure which still has potential.

Then there is the bus station. The existing Brunel Bus Station & Car Park is a reinforced concrete structure with open moulded panels of no great beauty but characteristic of its time, c. 1970. It has achieved fame more recently in the opening credits of Ricky Gervais's television series, *The Office* (set, of course, in Slough) and is admired by the Roundabout Appreciation Society (no, not a joke). Under the masterplan, it will be replaced by an exciting new bus station designed by Bblur [*sic*] architects. This will have a streamlined, wrap-around, 140m-long metallic canopy to make it look like a space-ship and the design has already been hailed as "iconic". How sad that people cannot see that each bus station design, in its own time, is modish, pretentious and derivative – so why replace one with another at huge expense?

"Come friendly bombs, and fall on Slough / To get it ready for the plough..." Slough council might seem to be taking Betjeman's exhortation literally. Because of the recession, one of the council's intended partners in this "regeneration", Development Securities, is, not surprisingly, holding back with its plans for new houses and offices. So if the council goes ahead and razes the bus station, the libraries and Thames Valley University as well as the Town Hall, the centre of this "primary regional node" will not be "an attractive gateway to the town" but merely a vast bombed-site. And all achieved with precious public money.

IF THE Thames Valley University Library* is *bulldozed, Milord Rogers will qualify for membership of the Rubble Club, a new mutual support society for architects who suffer the trauma of seeing their masterpieces demolished in their lifetime.

It derives from the Macallan Club (named after the whisky) founded by Isi Metzstein and Andy MacMillan of the distinguished Glasgow firm of Gillespie Kidd & Coia. But it seems a pity that a distinction isn't made between buildings demolished because of changed circumstances and those whose short life stemmed from functional or structural inadequacy.

For instance, churches by Gillespie Kidd & Coia have perished owing to the malice and incompetence of the Roman Catholic archdiocese of Glasgow (*Eyes passim*), but the Berners Pool at Grange-over-Sands was demolished by the local authority after only six years as it did not work and nobody was prepared to take it on (*Eyes *1181 & 1193). Its architect, Stephen Hodder (he of the notorious Clissold Baths (*Eyes passim ad nauseam*), sobs: "What I mourned was how expendable all that energy was when so many people had given so much." Yes: the council taxpayers of South Lakeland who had given £3.5m for a piece of award-winning pretentious junk.

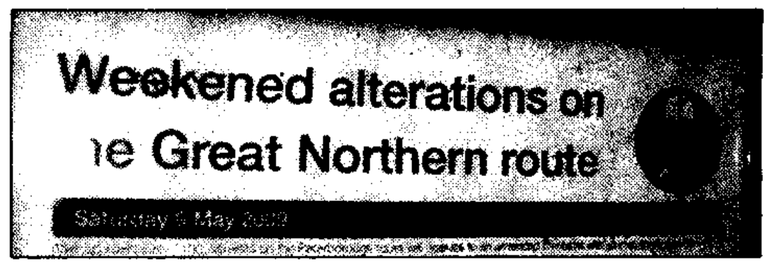
'Piloti'

YOUNG BRITISH ARTISTS

BY BIRCH

I-SPY

King's Lynn Station.
Submitted byAdrian Brown.



Solihull, W. Midlands.

Submitted by Barry Teague.

£10 paid for similar submissions.

BEATRIX POTTY

FOLLOWERS of the career of Marxist feminist Green party candidate and republican journalist Beatrix Campbell were astonished when she was awarded an OBE for services to equal opportunities in the Queen's birthday honours last month (*Eye* 1239).

Campbell was one of the first proponents of a belief in the Satanic ritual abuse myth in the early 1990s and remained resolutely vocal in support, together with a network of believers, long after government-commissioned research, by Professor Jean La Fontaine, concluded in 1994 there was no evidence to support the claims. Before and even since that report, dozens of families were devastated by false allegations that they were devil worshipping paedophiles sexually abusing children in Satanic rituals that included drinking blood and urine and sacrificing animals and babies.

In the 1990s Campbell also wrote in defence of the now discredited "recovered memory" therapy after which adult patients alleged they had been sexually abused in childhood. Professional regulatory bodies have since warned practitioners such recovered memory techniques could implant false memories.

Campbell and her partner Judith Jones (formerly Dawson), a social worker involved in the notorious Nottingham case in which social workers came to believe a genuine and vile case of incest was "Satanic", wrote a book, *Stolen Voices: An exposure of the Campaign to Discredit Childhood Testimony*, due to be published in November 1999. In fact it was a diatribe against anyone who dared question the existence of ritual abuse and whether some allegations of abuse might be false and it had to be withdrawn on the eve of publication following extensive complaints of inaccuracies and threats of legal action for libel.

Two pre-publication reviews give a flavour. The *Independent* described it as "a polemic, salted with emotive language and sarcastic commentary". It concluded: "Its authors are so blinded by ideology that they do a disservice to the people they claim to represent." And in a scathing review in the *Evening Standard*, La Fontaine, who had debunked ritual abuse, wrote: "The authors use personal attack to advance their view... The use of innuendo is distasteful and, where I can judge them, the 'facts' are not true."

Earlier, at the height of the Satanic panic, in October 1990, Campbell had also produced a much panned documentary for Channel 4's *Dispatches* programme, in which she claimed to reveal evidence of Satanic child abuse in Nottingham.

The Nottinghamshire chief constable, Dan Compton, whose officers had exhaustively investigated the allegations of ritual abuse and murder made by social workers (including Campbell's partner Judith Dawson/Jones), sent a dossier to the home secretary "to kill off once and for all" the claims of ritual abuse. He accused Campbell's film of "sensationalising unsubstantiated stories".

At least the OBE will look better on the Campbell CV than the pulped book and derided documentary.

Letters

Taking the Michael

Sir,

I am forced to write in disgust at your treatment of the Michael Jackson story in this, your current issue (see Eye 1240).

I am fairly sure that when I get this issue I will be so appalled that I may have to consider cancelling my fortnightly walk to the newsagents for the purposes of purchasing your (normally) fine organ.

In disgust,
DAVE OLDHAM,

Via email.

Lookalike

Terrifying

Actor

Sir,

Could they be related? Vincent Price, star of Michael Jackson's Thriller, and Michael Jackson's father, Joe.

PAUL HUGHES,

Via email.

Blind to reason

Sir,

Lunchtime O'Boulez is right to doubt the credibility of classical music competitions, but quite wrong when he suggests that blind musicians are "bound to be a problem when they're part of an ensemble". In my experience, they're quite the opposite, as they use their ears, as good musicians do.

As for O'Boulez's incredulity about Nobuyuki Tsujii hearing a conductor's breathing above the sound of the orchestra, any professional musician will tell you that in 90% of cases, they never look at the conductor after the first few notes anyway, and before these his or her in-breath (or in some cases, loud sniff) is all too audible.

All the best,
DAVID McGUINNESS,

Glasgow.

E.T. go home

Sir,

Re "Music & Musicians" Eye 1238, where the quality of Classic FM was challenged most rudely.

As a music student just about to graduate, I think the article that attacked Classic FM's contribution to the musical education of this country was very unfair! After all, how else would we know that if you take the melody of a well-known pop song and arrange it for full orchestra that it magically becomes classical music? Or that the theme from "E.T" is such a quality piece of classical music that it is worth listening to again and again; I can think of no other reason they choose to continuously air it.

KATHERINE LEWINGTON,

Via email.

Numbers game

Sir,

The solution to police forces using 0845 numbers ("Don't call us", Eye 1239) is simple – change them to 0345 numbers which are charged the same as 01 and 02 numbers. In fact all is needed is the 08 to change to 03 as Ofcom planned for this to happen when it set up the 03 number range. This means the police can still keep the complex routing plans to send calls to different call centres depending on circumstances.

Regarding making money from receiving 0845 calls, Ofcom could end this in the future.

Regards,
PETER BARRINGTON,

Weston-super-Mare.

Village people

Sir,

Your anonymous correspondent (Eye 1239) can come out of hiding.

*The fact is that **all** 2,800 of the Olympic Village flats are being built without kitchens. Although not widely advertised, this is not a secret and it is being done so that an extra athlete can be accommodated in each flat. This arrangement was made necessary when the Olympics Delivery Authority (ODA) agreed to reduce the number of flats from the original 4,500 (although the £1.095 billion price tag has mysteriously **not** been reduced at all).*

Nor will the athletes be expected to use "onsite restaurants or local amenities". The ODA intends the athletes to be fed in massive communal catering facilities which will be part of the Games.

I would like to express support for the idea of offering MPs accommodation in the Village once the kitchens are reinstated (sometime around 2014) as it is nice to imagine them all being "kettled" out in Stratford. However, the average cost of each of the private sector flats in the village will be £575,000 and I for one do not fancy having to pay for a mortgage – or even a rent – based on that extortionate figure.

MIRA BAR-HILLEL,

Property and Planning Correspondent, Evening Standard.

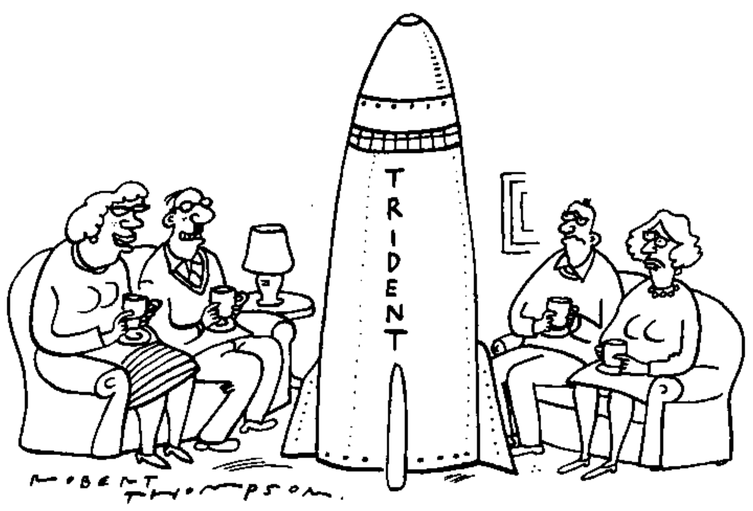
Reformed characters

Sir,

We in the United Reformed Church feel honoured to feature so prominently in Nooks & Corners (Eye 1239) with the sale of our redundant church at Hopton. What does it matter that you got our name wrong? In any case, we suspect that was a deliberate ploy to lead suspicion away from the mole among us, who planted such a mischievous piece. There is a legitimate debate throughout the Church about what should happen to historic buildings. But we are also interested in building the living Church of today.

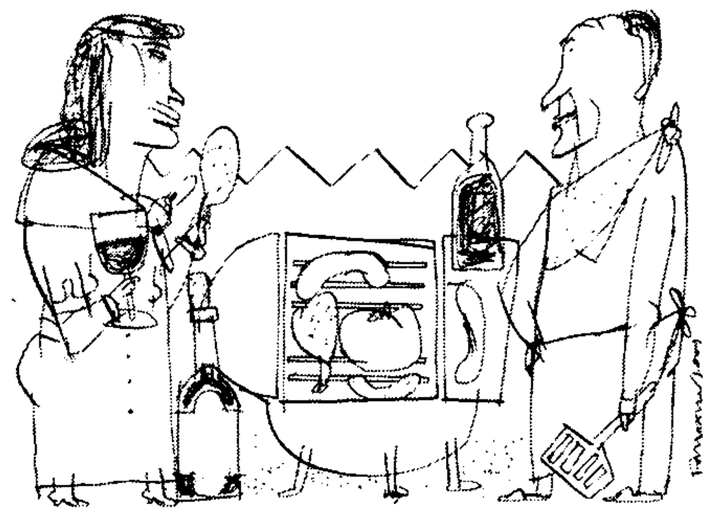
VAL MORRISON,

Yorkshire Synod Clerk, United Reformed Church.



"Oh, we don't really need it... it's one of life's little luxuries"

Scenes You Seldom See



"Roll on winter, when we can forget all about barbecues and eat civilised food sitting down comfortably indoors"

A probation officer writes...

Sir,

It may surprise Nick Binns ("Probation on Trial", Letters, Eye 1239) to discover this, but we probation officers live in daily fear of one of our supervisees committing a serious further offence. This is not only because of the inevitable slaughtering that we will receive from ill-informed newspaper columnists and bar room commentators such as Mr Binns, but far more importantly because we are only too aware of the horror and trauma that such offences cause for victims and their families.

We do actually live in the same community as everyone else, though we are perhaps more likely to come into direct contact with victims through our work with the courts, our own victim liaison units, child protection conferences and, yes, by supervising offenders who have themselves been victims of violent or sexual crimes. What cases like that of Sonnax show are not that probation officers or even private companies are responsible for these crimes. They instead show that no matter how much or how little you spend and no matter what you call them, some clients/criminals go on to commit acts of unimaginable brutality for which they themselves are solely responsible.

DAVID MOFFITT
(Probation Officer, Woking office),

Godalming, Surrey.

Sir,

The author of the letter headed "Probation on Trial" knows sod all. Probation officers have been referring to those people they deal with as "offenders" for about 12 years and, in London at least, the Probation Service operates and staffs numerous Victim Support Units.

Regards,
COLIN FIELD,

London NW7.

NOMS skulls

Sir,

What is it about the National Offender Management Service and open prisons (In the Back, 1239)? The last time they had an exceptionally highly performing one it was Blantyre House. What did NOMS do? Remove its governor (Eyes passim). Now they have another. The Askham Grange that I governed 20 years ago is described by the Chief Inspector, Anne Owers, as "outstanding" and a model that other prisons might emulate. What did NOMS do? Remove its governor.

At least Eoin McLennan-Murray, once of Blantyre, is using his exceptional gubernatorial skills at Lewes Prison. Alec McCrystal of Askham, meanwhile, has been redeployed to use his behind a desk at NOMS.

Sincerely,
PETER QUINN,

Helperby, N. Yorks.

Pedantry Corner

... It wasn't young writers of the 1950s whom Somerset Maugham called "scum" (Books & Bookmen, 1239); it was the young, new brand of university academics such as Lucky Jim's Jim Dixon, protagonist of Kingsley Amis's novel; an hilarious mis-reading.

BRIAN GLANVILLE.

... Um, not wishing to explain or indeed the Grauniad's policy for paying its "graduate-level writers" (Street of Shame, Eye 1239), if you assume a 35-hour week (that is, no pay for lunch-hours in a notional 40-hour week) and further assume the Grauniad "pays" for 52 weeks a year, the hourly rate for these writers on a pro-rata annual salary of £10,428 works out as, surprise, surprise, £5.73; that is, the legal minimum. It's still bloody stingy for new graduates; but, since Tony Blair wanted everyone to be a graduate, what's a newspaper corporation to do but pay them peanuts?

PED D'ANTICK.

*... When I last checked, trainline.com was the website of a Californian rock band called Train. **the**trainline.com is, however, an online vendor of train tickets recently told by the ASA not to repeat an advert.*

THOMAS WRIGHT.

... If Mary Dejevsky (Street of Shame, Eye 1239) wants politicians to learn in preparation for the next EU elections she could note that they will be in five years rather than four years time...

ROBERT McWHIRTER.

Rausing chorus

Sir,

Re Granta and "Books and Bookmen", Eye 1239.

Your column presents an almost parodically distorted version of recent events at Granta. You imply that John Freeman, "smoothie American critic", instigated a "coup" to get rid of Alex Clark, editor of Granta, and take over the position himself. That is not what happened. Nor was John's piece in the Independent intended to disparage British literary culture in favour of America, as you imply. It was about bringing translated fiction into the Anglo-American literary culture. There was no "implicit view that lifeless Brit lit is beyond resuscitation". That seems an oversensitive, as well as a mistaken, reading of it, to say the least.

There is no "identity crisis" at Granta; the reference to "activist non-fiction" refers to Portobello Books, and is something we have always done. We are not considering taking advertising only from "non-profit-making organisations", or publishing only "urgent books that don't need to sell". The wine thing was a joke (people did laugh), and I don't think of myself as a "bohemian Tetra Pak Heiress Granta Sugar Mummy", madly throwing money at lefty causes.

What I have said is that we should no longer think about "what sells" as a primary acquisitions criteria for books. What I mean by that is that we shouldn't second-guess our readers, neither in terms of text or in terms of jackets. We will publish fiction and non-fiction of the highest quality; books that we love and believe in, with covers that are as beautiful and arresting as we can make them.

The notion of "what sells" can so easily become code for blocking good initiatives, and is in any case based on a false distinction between publishers and readers.

If independent publishing means anything, it must be the freedom to publish what you believe in.

SIGRID RAUSING,

Publisher, Granta.

Lookalike

Sue Barker

Anne Widdecombe

Sir,

Anyone know what's happened to Sue Barker now that her job presenting Wimbledon tennis has been taken over by Anne Widdecombe?

K. COCHRANE,

Via email.

Whiff of snobbery?

Sir,

I was somewhat taken aback by your sniffy stance on the proposed redevelopment of Oxford Brookes Uni (Nooks & Corners, Eye 1238).

Surely it is high time the "dismal collection of 1950s and 1960s blocks" were replaced? Perhaps it is worth reminding the Ed not everyone has had the privilege of attending "the other slightly older one". The Ed must remember the benefits of learning in a beautiful and orderly set of buildings, albeit old and established. To label the idea of improvement "an overweening anti-social project" is using strong language for a scheme to improve surroundings for less privileged students.

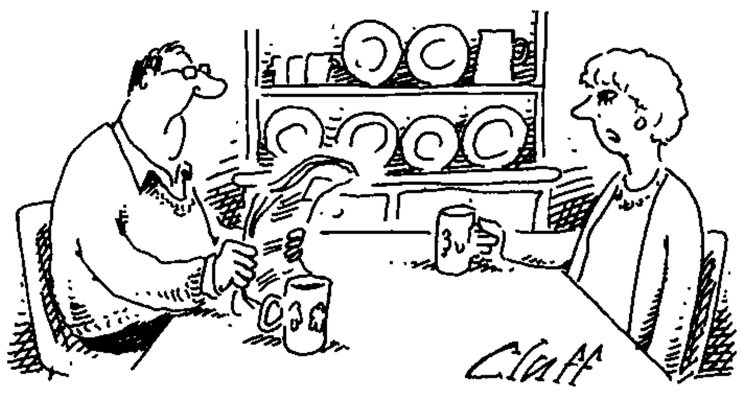
Methinks an undertone of snobbery lurks in these views?

It matters not a jot that [architect] Richard Rose-Casemore is my husband's cousin and a thoroughly nice bloke.

Yours faithfully,

CATHERINE HOLDEN,

Hartlebury, Worcs.



"I've decided to deselect you"

Colemanballs

£10 paid for contributions

"I'm currently writing a screenplay that I haven't started yet."

SERENA WILLIAMS, BBC
(Steve Turner)

"Winning matches is the best recipe for winning."

VIRGINIA WADE
(Roderic Mather)

"You don't have to be a rocket surgeon to know that you need to get up quick on him."

BARRY McDERMOTT, Sky Sports
(Phill Gillespie)

"Yes, the wind is coming from Federer's end..."

Commentator, BBC
(Marian Quinney)

"... you were up against the Norwegians who are, literally, born on skis."

KATE SILVERTON, BBC
(Keith Agar)

Pseudo Names

... I must say I was sceptical when I saw "Gordon Brown" in the Pseudo Names section of your paper. I imagine that if a famous person were to write in to this section, they would disguise their true identity with a "comedy" nomenclature.

MR. E. GUEST.

... There you are, I told you that this feature would run and run!

NADIA B. LEAVEME.

... Here in Egypt we are very frightened that the Pseudo Names page will be discontinued...

TERRY FAYED
PETRA FAYED.

... Your correspondent C. Nyle is DEFINITELY NOT and NEVER HAS BEEN my brother!

D. NYLE.

... I know that you are probably desperate to put an end to all these letters with silly names, but surely a bunch of classically educated chaps like you wouldn't turn down the gift of an opportunity like this?

TIM YEO
DANNY O'SETT
DONNA FLORENTIS.

... The prolongation of your Pseudo Names item represents poor value for the reader and ought to be the subject of an investigation by a radio consumer programme.

EWAN YAWSE.

... One just has to shout out with joy at the sheer inventiveness of the Pseudo Names column.

U. REEKA
R.K. MEEDES.

... See, you can't stop it, you opened it up and it will never stop.

PANDORA SPOCKS.

... How about a reality show to find the person who's best at making up names?

FAY McADAMEY.

... Despite all the criticisms, your Pseudo Names column has something very few columns ever manage to achieve. It's got soul.

KEITH ONTRUCKEN.

... My community and I are so grateful for the continuation of this column that we would like to impart a fraternal greeting, and wish you every blessing in your labours.

DOM INNES VAUX-BISCOMBE.

... As a Native Indian poet, I find your magazine's humour quite obscure. Perhaps a few back issues would help me understand your elaborate humour.

RUNNING JOKE.

Signore,

Images of Berlusconi's villa frolics are forbidden here in Italy. Can you help me visualise what a liaison between an old man and a young woman looks like?

Grazie,

ANN CHIPANCHI,

Via email.

... Many of your older readers, noticing how very popular your most amusing Pseudo Names feature has become, will be extremely worried as to where we may locate any overflow of the column. Please could you clarify your plans for this eventuality?

C. PAGE (94).

● Those Pseudo Names in full – www.private-eye.co.uk

Letter from **Abuja**

from Our Own Correspondent

NEW documents have emerged showing the British government and Shell colluded with senior figures in the Nigerian military junta against activist Ken Saro-Wiwa in the early 1990s.

Secret papers, uncovered in the recently settled US legal action, show intelligence collusion between the British high commission and Shell here in Abuja, and between Shell and our former dictator Sani Abacha.

At the time Saro-Wiwa was leading a campaign against the environmental devastation of Ogoniland and for a greater share of oil wealth. By 1994, the Ogoni people were suffering a violent military backlash and called for international help. Your Anita Roddick, founder of the Body Shop, tried to set up a fact-finding tour. In April 1994, the British high commission here secretly wrote to Shell informing it that Body Shop "will not get their way". Later that month the commission again passed information to Shell, saying visas for the visit had been refused.

A month later, four Ogoni elders were murdered, the crime for which Saro-Wiwa would later be tried and hanged in what was widely condemned as a sham trial. The day before the murders, Brian Anderson, head of Shell here in Nigeria, told colleagues in London he had tried to get Abacha on the phone to talk about the Ogoni issue. Anderson, who had Abacha's two private telephone numbers, said: "I think it is important that we are seen by him to be assisting the state by giving him the requisite intelligence as it comes to us… it is a delicate issue and needs to be carefully handled."

Just weeks after Saro-Wiwa's arrest, Anderson noted: "I saw the British high commissioner and also his man from Abuja and we discussed the Ogoni issue. Reports from their intelligence support the view that the Ogoni leaders were brutally murdered by Ken Saro-Wiwa's militant MOSOP youth wing. They believe that the government has good reason to arrest him and those who may have been involved… It shows the sort of actions that this so-called peace-loving man is capable of."

Later that month, the British high commissioner over here, Thorold Masefield, and his wife accompanied Anderson on a two-day tour of the Niger Delta. Anderson noted: "This went well, and I believe that he was happy with what he learnt. He is prepared to assist us in dealing with the government on economic and the Ogoni issues." Elsewhere in the document, Anderson wrote: "I am in touch with the British Secret Service representative in Lagos. He has agreed to keep me informed of any developments that might be of interest to Shell."

Shell, meanwhile, met the Nigerian ambassador back in London, who complained "about the Body Shop and their activities among the more militant NGOs". The ambassador offered to help Shell in its anti-Ogoni propaganda film (*Eye* 1143) if Shell "encountered any difficulties" with permits, and offered to "use his influence" to sort things out. He told Shell there was "every chance that [Saro-Wiwa] would be found guilty".

The British continued to keep Shell informed of their intelligence, which changed by early 1995 to thinking Saro-Wiwa was innocent. In April, some seven months before Saro-Wiwa's execution, Anderson wrote: "The British high commissioner believes that although the charges should not stick the government will make sure he is found guilty. He would be then sentenced to death, and reprieved after giving in to pressure from outside, but be incarcerated for a very long time."

Shell and the British continued to push for "quiet diplomacy", a stance many believed contributed to Saro-Wiwa being hanged in November 1995 to international outrage. Your then PM John Major called it "judicial murder". Maybe he should have looked at what his own spooks had been doing to see if he too had blood on his hands.

FUNNY OLD WORLD

COMPILED BY **VICTOR LEWIS-SMITH**

O "Indra Ningsih came here from Indonesia to work as a domestic maid for the Mok family," solicitor Vincent Lee told the Kwun Tong Magistrates' Court in Hong Kong, "and her employers were unhappy with her performance. Mr Mok had been constantly scolding her ever since she was hired, so one evening she decided to use an old Indonesian potion to improve the relationship. While boiling vegetables, she added a used sanitary towel to the cooking water, in the belief that if the family ingested her menstrual

blood, they would become more amicable. She only added the blood to improve the relationship, and cannot understand why she has been charged with 'administering poison or other destructive or noxious substances with intent to injure,' after a family member caught her removing the sanitary towel from the pot and discarding in the bin."

During the hearing, it emerged that Ningsih was not the first Asian worker to try this remedy in Hong Kong. "In some Southeast Asian cultures," the solicitor explained, "menstrual blood, urine and faeces are thought to have magical powers to improve a difficult work environment. In December 2007, another Indonesian domestic helper added her own urine to her employer's drinking water, and was jailed for three months after he noticed a difference in taste. And in 2008, two Asian domestic helpers received four months in prison for contaminating their employer's tea with urine and menstrual blood." *(The Hong Kong Standard, 16/4/09. Spotter: Patrick Johnson)*

O *"We used to think the only people susceptible to such hoaxes were either insane or ignorant illiterates," Abla Hasnain of King Abdulaziz University told reporters in Jeddah, "but what we're now seeing is educated people and academics falling victim to this nonsense. There is absolutely no proof that 'red mercury' even exists, and lab tests have shown that Singer sewing machines certainly do not contain any. Yet over the past few weeks, people have been selling sewing machines to each other for fantastic sums, and even breaking into tailors' shops to steal them, all because of rumours. We have to find out who started this hoax and put a stop to it."*

Hasnain was speaking after rumours swept through the Saudi kingdom that foreign companies were buying up Singer sewing machines for half a million riyals (£90,000) each, then extracting 'red mercury' and selling it abroad for millions of dollars. "Friendships have been destroyed over this," observed Saleh Zuweid, "because people have been borrowing sewing machines from their neighbours, then selling them in the market. Others have been demanding the return of sewing machines that they gave away as presents decades ago, and I've heard of people getting into fights with their brothers over sewing machines that belong to their grandmothers. According to the rumours, 'red mercury' is also food for the Jinn, who will then bring you buried treasure from deep in the ground." (Bahrain Tribune, 17/4/09. Spotter: Denis Collins)

– O –

O Police Blotter. Information from the public safety records of the Lake Oswego Police Department. Police recently filed reports on the following incidents:

4/6/09 5:09 p.m. A dead duck was found at a pond near a coffee shop on Boones Ferry Road.

4/7/09 7:30 a.m. A deceased duck was reported on Westview Drive. Standing next to it was a live duck.

4/7/09 11:41 a.m. An officer was unable to catch two dogs at large in a road.

4/7/09 11:42 a.m. A man with his left leg hanging out the window was seen driving down Boones Ferry Road.

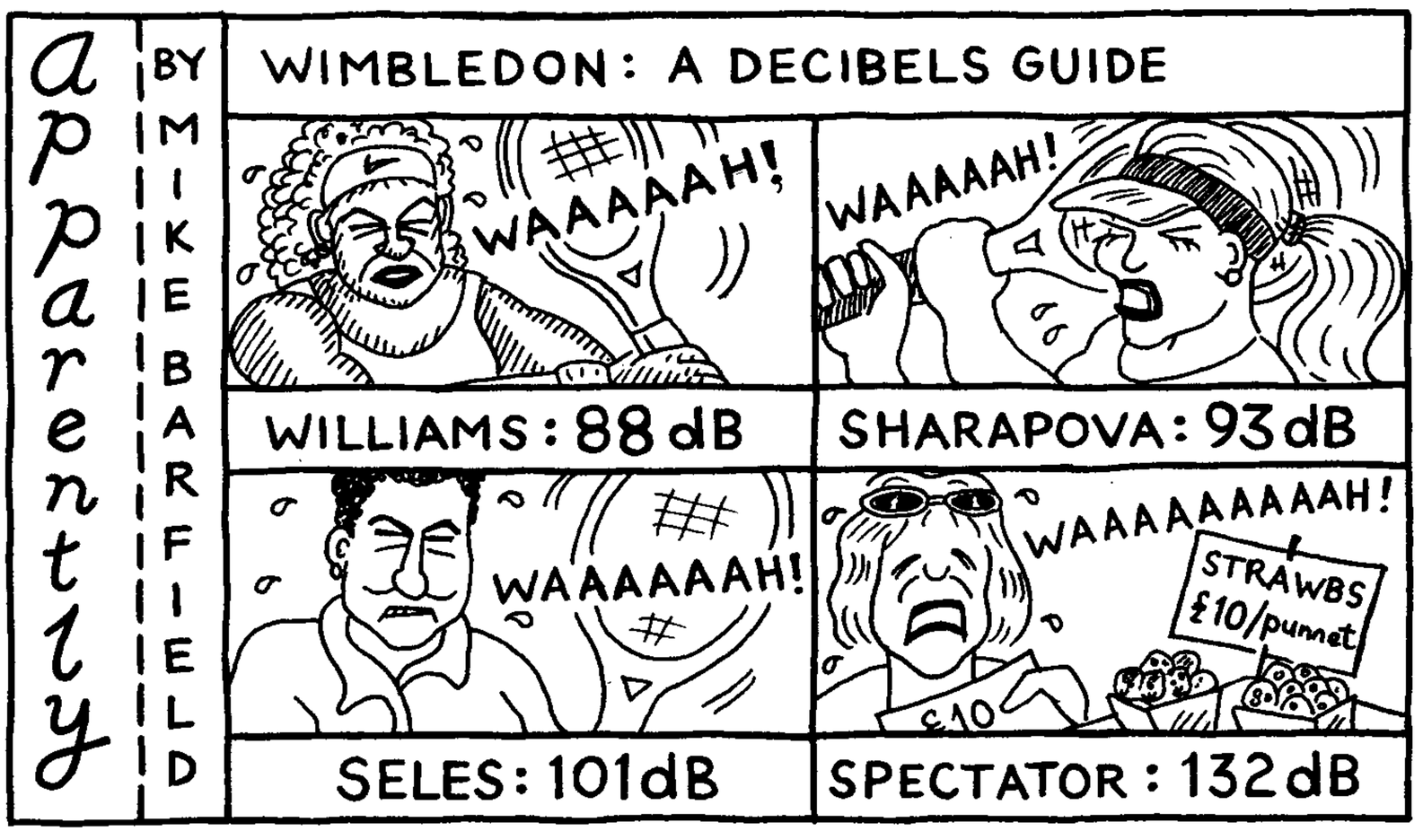
4/7/09 11:56 a.m. A solicitor left a flyer at a residence despite a sign saying 'No solicitation'.

4/7/09 1:35 p.m. A psychology student made a loud rasping noise in her front yard. A police check discovered she was gardening.

4/7/09 3:08 p.m. Officers were unable to locate a mewing cat.

4/8/09 9:21 p.m. A woman keeps smelling almonds in her laundry room.

4/9/09 9:30 a.m. A neighbour has been allowing a frog to hop outside his shop window. *(Lake Oswego News, 16/4/09. Spotter: Gary Pope)*



PRIME MINISTERIAL DECREE NO. 48

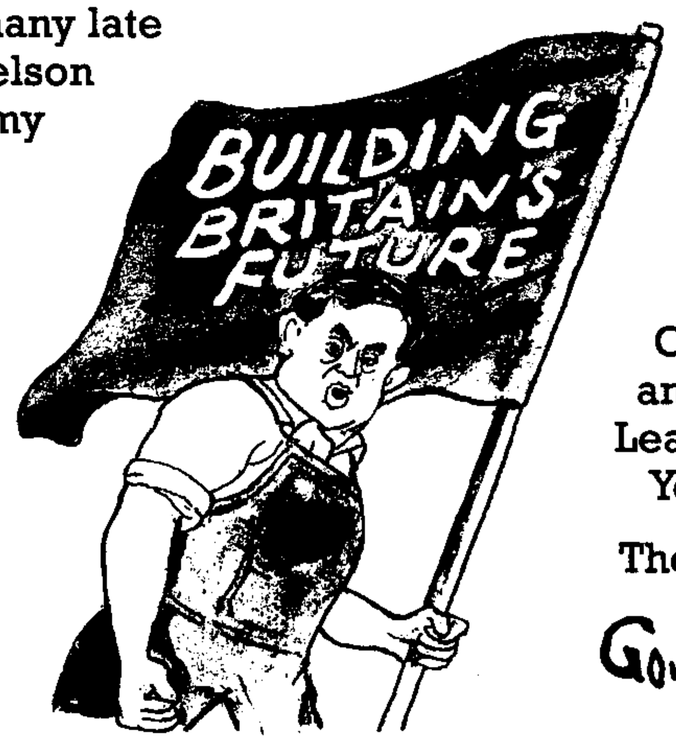
From the Desk of the Supreme Leader

BUILDING BRITAIN'S FUTURE

Comrades,

Great news! After careful thought and many late night conversations with Comrades Mandelson and Balls, I am now in a position to unveil my detailed 5-Year Plan for the rebuilding of Britain in the Age of Change.

Let us be clear, the ideology of targetism identified with the many errors of the discredited former leader ex-Comrade Blair, has now been cast into the dustbin of history. And not before time. The decent, hard-working families of Britain have no need for centrally-imposed, artificial and meaningless targets.



As we have seen only too clearly, this bourgeois and paternalist concept has led to nothing but chaos, inefficiency and fraud in every corner of our hugely successful schools, hospitals, police and all other public services.

From now on, the entire apparat of hated Milburnite-Blairist targetology will be utterly dismantled and replaced by a revolutionary new apparat based on universal human rightsism, to become a shining beacon to the world.

The hard-working workers of Britain will wake up, thinking not of meeting targets. They will spring from their beds, thinking only of their rights.

And what are these rights, Comrades? Let me spell them out for you.

1. The right to consult the top cancer specialist in Britain within four hours after you have been told that you have cancer (subject to availability).

2. The right of every child to be given a place in the best school in the country (subject to availability).

3. The right of every hard-working British citizen to live in a zero tolerance crime-free environment, with at least two policemen on the beat outside their homes 24/7 (subject to availability).

4. The right of every hard-working British family to enjoy affordable carbon-free housing of their choice, with a low interest, fixed price mortgage from the state-owned People's Bank of Scotland (subject to availability).

5. The right of every hard-working, non-working British Comrade to a secure, well-paid job, guaranteeing an income of not less than £50,000, including pension rights (subject to availability).

And, Comrades, I have not finished. There are still more rights to be listed if I am to reach the target I have set myself, ie a minimum of 10 new rights every week.

6. The right of every hard-working British worker (and their families) to enjoy cheap, efficient public transport wherever they wish to go and at a time of their choice. (For details of travel restrictions due to engineering works, etc, visit our website www.notrainstoday.gov.uk)

7. The right of all Comrades to enjoy good governance, a soundly-run economy and politicians who will at all times act in the public interest and will speak honestly at all times and in every respect, taking their lead from the example set by the Supreme Leader who always tells the truth (subject to availability).

8. The right of all Comrades to enjoy warm, sunny weather throughout the year, rather than suffer the discomfort and inefficiency of old-fashioned rain-and-shine-ism, whose days are gone.

9. The right of all Comrades to enjoy all these rights without reservation (subject to availability).

10. The right of every British Comrade to enjoy the benign guidance and wise helmsmanship of their Supreme Leader (available in perpetuity).

Yours, in perpetuity,

The RIGHT Honourable

Gordon Brownloader

Supreme Leader

A Message From The Supreme Deputy Supreme Leader, Supreme First Secretary of The Party and Supreme Lord President of the Council, Comrade Lord Mandelson of Wherever You Live

Some troublemakers, would-be wreckers and other revanchist elements (some of whom, to their shame, are members of Politburo) have been asking the question "How are we to raise the money needed to pay for all the State's spending commitments after the year 2009, when we are now £2 trillion in debt?".

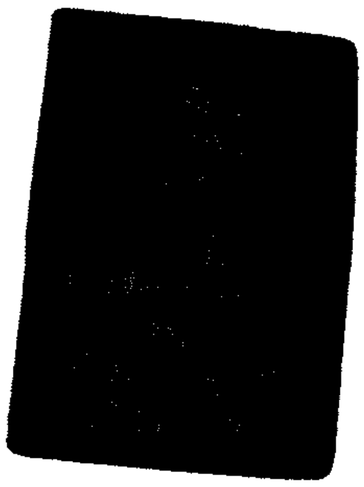
The answer to this question is very simple. We will tell you after the election when the Supreme Leader has yet again led us to victory on a platform of complete economic transparency.

Until then, for us to speculate as to how all these commitments are to be funded would be totally irresponsible.

PM (or should I say, "Deputy PM"?!!)

"A zero percent rise in public spending under Labour is one hundred percent better than a zero percent cut under the Tories"

Taken from The Little Brown Book, Chapter 94, "How to provoke laughter from members of the Supreme Soviet without knowing why they are laughing"



"I'm sorry Cuthbert, but because you came last in the running race... you must die"

A Taxi Driver writes

EVERY week a well-known Cabbie is invited to comment on an issue of topical importance. This week **Bernie Ecclestone** (cab no. F1) on ***The Virtues of Strong Leadership in Contemporary Politics***

ALL RIGHT in the back, guv? You can't see me cos I'm small, but I *am* 'ere, honest. Sorry I'm going so slow traffic's terrible tell you what that Hitler would have sorted it out don't get me wrong I'm not a Nazi or nothing but he did a lot of good he got the country going right who invented motorways? Hitler. So there you are – stands to reason Hitler was a very great man to my mind. If he was alive today I could get you to Heathrow in two minutes driving at 180 mph in the new Von Braun Formula One cab. Go! Go! Go! You know what I'd do with those people who get in my way, like that old lady in the Morris Minor in front? I'd string them up! That's what the Führer would have done. Not that I'm a Nazi but credit where it's due, guv.

I 'ad that Max Mosley in the back of the cab. Now there's a strong leader an' a very clever man. 'E would make a good prime minister, no seriously...

NEXT WEEK: Nick Griffin (cab no. BNP1) on the problems confronting Formula One Motor Racing in a Period of Austerity.

GLENDA SLAGG

Britain's Number One Seedy?!

■GREAT TRAIN Robber Ronnie Biggs!?!! Let the poor old boy out of jail, for Gawd's sake!?!! What harm will he do to anyone a-dribblin' and a-droolin' in his wheelchair?!?? One thing's for sure, he won't be robbing any trains in *his* state!?! And anyway it was all a long time ago and he's served his debt to society!?! OK, so he escaped from jail!!? Who wouldn't?!? Good luck to him, I say, and let's give Runaway Ronnie the freedom he so richly deserves – and while we are at it let's name a train after him!!?! The Biggsy Express!?! Non-stop Euston to Brazil!!?! Geddit?! All aboard!!?!

■RONNIE BIGGS – what a disgrace!!?! The sheer cheek of the man, expecting us to let him out after what he did!?! And don't tell me he's paid his debt to society – he escaped, for Gawd's sake!?! Let him out and the first thing he'll do is go and rob a train – and probably beat someone senseless while he's at it!?! 'Cos villains like that don't change their spots!?! No, I say let him rot in jail. And whoever suggested naming a train after him, they should be locked up as well!?!!

■THREE CHEERS for Katrin Radmacher!?! She's the Happy Heiress, the Princess of Pre-Nups, stoopid, who stopped her gold-diggin' ex-hubby getting his filthy fingers on her fab fortune!?! Men!!? They're only after one thing!?! Cheques!!? (Geddit?) So gals – take a tip from Ms Ratcatcher (geddit?) before you tie the knot!? Make him sign on the dotted line which says "Clear off, Mr Moneygrabber!"!?!!

■OI MISTER!?! What happened to good old-fashioned romance?!?? Time was when you went a-wooin' with some chocs 'n' flowers!?! Now you have to take a signed pre-nup agreement saying you don't mind scarpering without a penny when it all goes pear-shaped!?!! Blimey!? What kind of a world are we living in when your hubby can't take you to the cleaners!?! For richer, for poorer?! Richer and richer, more like!?!

■*HERE THEY ARE – Glenda's Heatwave He-Men!?!*

- **Buzz Aldrin.** OK, so he wasn't first on the Moon, but I like a man who comes second!?! Geddit?!?
- **Andy Murray.** OK, so you didn't win Wimbledon!?! But I love a loser!?!! New balls, please!?! Mmmm!?!
- **Antony Gormley.** Can I come round and have a go on your plinth, Big Boy!?! Geddit?!?

Byeee!!

Film Highlights

THE GORDFATHER III

A Doctor Writes Boar Flu

AS A DOCTOR, I am often asked, "Have I Got Swine Flu?"

The simple answer is No. You have Bore Flu or *Borus tediossissimus normalis*, to give it the full medical name.

What happens is the patient comes into contact with a newspaper report detailing the symptoms of Swine Flu. At once, the patient becomes a colossal bore telling everyone he's got Swine Flu when he hasn't.

This may cause intense drowsiness in all those listening to him and in some cases this could prove terminally dull.

If you think you have got Bore Flu, you are advised to stay at home and be quiet – ("Nil by Mouth")

© A. Doctor Norman.

Advertisement

BBC

Expenses Control Co-ordinator

This newly-created senior management post will have a proven track record in curbing excessive pay and expenses by senior executives in top-heavy media organisations.

The successful applicant will be working closely alongside the BBC's newly appointed Expenses Co-ordination Controller and reporting directly to the newly appointed Director of Expense Control & Co-ordination Strategies (Controlling & Co-ordinating Expenses Division) as they create a multi-platform 360-degree overall strategy for reducing layers of unnecessary management and exorbitant expenditure within the Corporation.

The post carries a salary of £200,000 plus bonus (£200,000,000) plus generous expenses (inc. Bruce Forsyth's autograph and a designer Jana Bennett handbag).

'BISHOPS MUST REPENT' Says Tatchell

by **Aza Nazi-Rally**

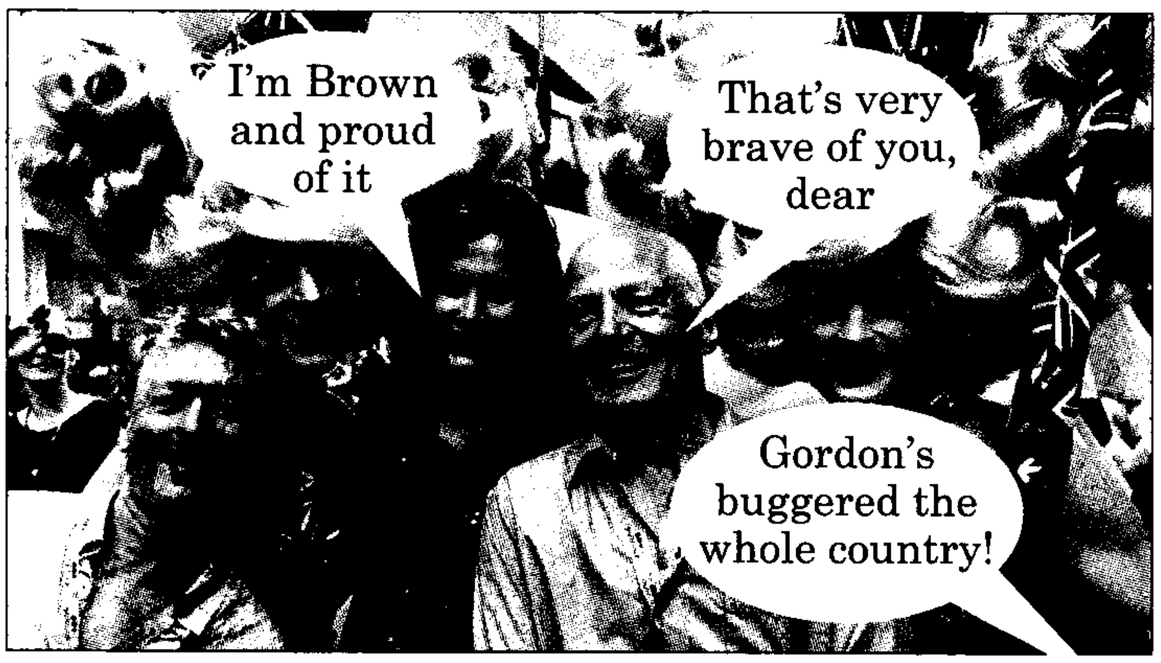
THE OUTSPOKEN Gay Rights activist has shocked many in the Bishoping community by demanding that Bishops should "repent" and "change their ways".

He told reporters, "It is no good saying they were born like that or that what they do is in some way natural. We all know that Bishops like dressing up in women's clothes and hanging about in vestries with a lot of other men."

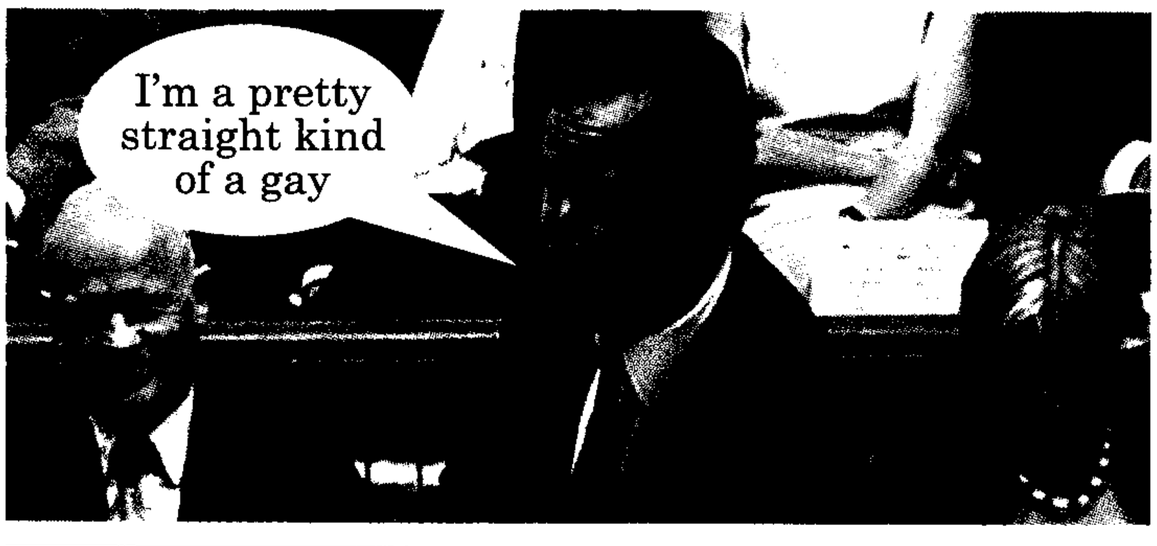
Bashing the Bishop

"I have nothing against Bishops," he went on. "I am not a Bishopophobe, but you wouldn't want your son to marry one."

YES! IT'S THE GORDY PRIDE MARCH!



CAMERON APOLOGISES FOR SECTION 28



POETRY CORNER

In Memoriam Colin Bean and Mollie Sugden, TV Actors

So. Farewell
Then Colin Bean.
You played Private Sponge
In *Dad's Army*.

But I must confess
I do not remember
Private Sponge.

Now you have
"Bean and
Gone".

Also Farewell
Then Molly Sugden.

You were Mrs
Slocombe in *Are You Being Served?*

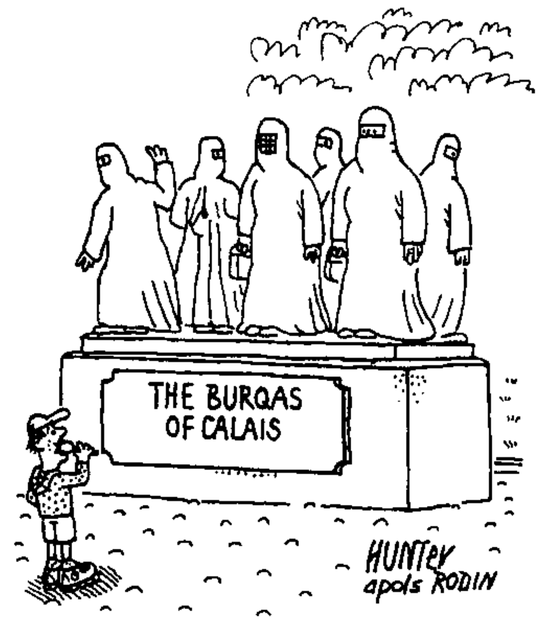
Coincidentally also
Written by
Croft and Perry
Who wrote *Dad's* Army.

Private Sponge
Had no catchphrase
And never spoke.

Mrs Slocombe, on
The other hand,
Always had a
Joke about her
Pussy.

In a way,
That was her
Cat-phrase.

E.J. Thribb (17½)



BBC Radio 3

Opera Highlights

Berlusconi's Il Disastro di Treno

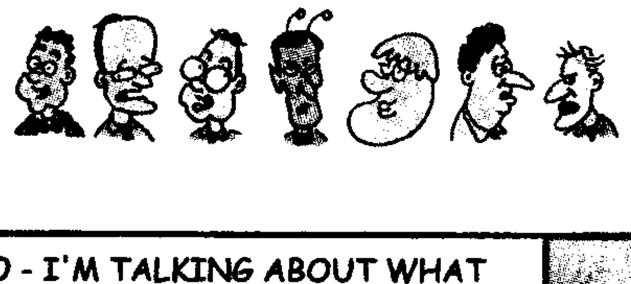
AS the curtain rises, it becomes clear that there has been a terrible train crash near the town of Viareggio. In his castle, Silvio, the Robber Baron, surveys the scene from afar and decides that this gives him a perfect excuse to visit the site of the tragedy and meet some young girls (surely "members of the emergency services").

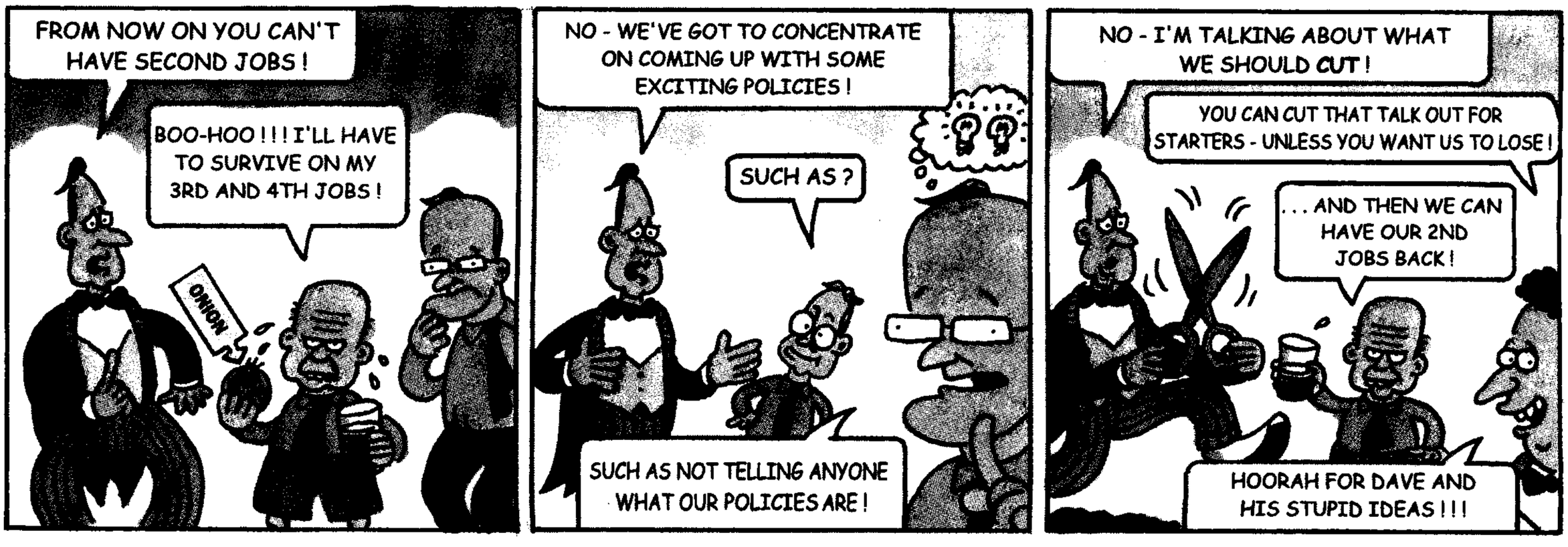
He sings the exultant aria *"O photo-opportunito!"* and proceeds to the scene. However, when he gets there, everyone starts booing him, singing the valedictory chorus *"Arrivederci Silvio"*.

CANNABIS factories in Carmarthenshire must be weeded out, a senior councillor has said.

Carmarthen Journal

Dave Snooty AND HIS PALS




FROM NOW ON YOU CAN'T HAVE SECOND JOBS!
BOO-HOO!!! I'LL HAVE TO SURVIVE ON MY 3RD AND 4TH JOBS!
ONION
NO - WE'VE GOT TO CONCENTRATE ON COMING UP WITH SOME EXCITING POLICIES!
SUCH AS?
SUCH AS NOT TELLING ANYONE WHAT OUR POLICIES ARE!
NO - I'M TALKING ABOUT WHAT WE SHOULD CUT!
YOU CAN CUT THAT TALK OUT FOR STARTERS - UNLESS YOU WANT US TO LOSE!
... AND THEN WE CAN HAVE OUR 2ND JOBS BACK!
HOORAH FOR DAVE AND HIS STUPID IDEAS!!!

The Daily Tottygraph
Friday, July 10, 2009

Fruity Girls Wear Fewer Clothes In Heatwave

Shock Survey Rocks Nation

by Phil Front-Page

IN AN amazing exposé of female flesh, the Daily Telegraph has learnt that putting fruity girls on the front pages is a sure-fire way of selling newspapers to middle-aged men on trains.

Said one commuter, "I thought that nothing could be more interesting than the Lib Dem MP who claimed for an extra Post-It Note on his second box file, but I was wrong".

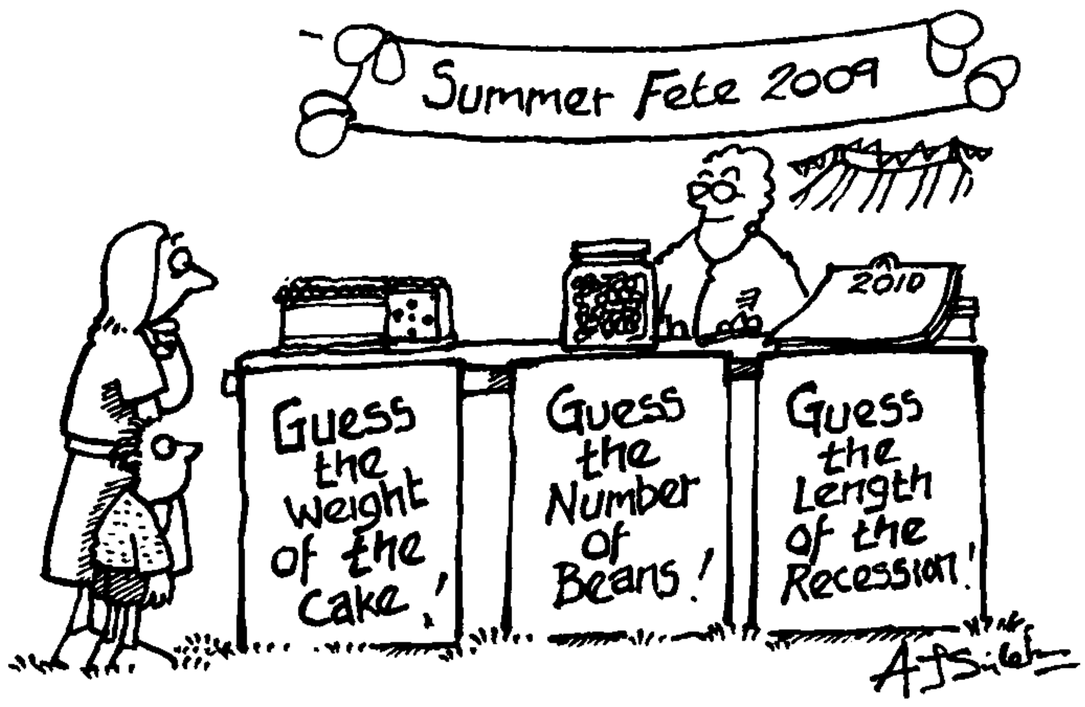
He continued, "Phwoar! I say! Those girls really are quite fruity, particularly in the sunshine."

INSIDE

Comment
Is this the hottest totty since records began? Benedict Brogan looks into the Fruity Furore **PAGE 1**

Fashion
What not to wear in the heatwave **PAGE 2**

Education
Why are there no fruity girls celebrating their 'A' Level results? *(It's only July. Ed.)*



A message from the Mayor of London

Boris Johnson

BoJo Calling! Cripes! It seems yet another of my deputies has had to walk the plank. Turns out that young Clement was a bit of a crook – wining and dining his bird and paying on a City Hall credit card.

Doesn't he realise that that's *my* job? Don't panic, PR chaps, just Boris's little joke!

But, really, it's getting beyond a joke. I mean, this is the fifth blighter who's turned out to be a wrong 'un.

Why do they all work for me? Which idiot chooses them in the first place? Hang on, it's me, isn't it?

Perhaps I should go too?

No, then there'd be no one left and, before you knew it, Red Ken would be back with his newts.

We can't have that, can we?

No, I'd better just soldier on until the next one goes.

Cheerio!

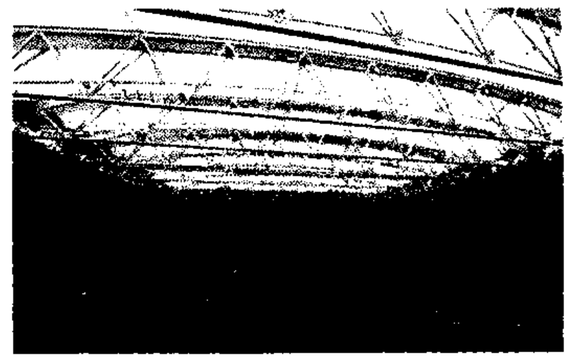
Boris

"BoJo – Working For A Switched-On London"

WIMBLEDON CROWDS APPLAUD BRITISH ROOF

by Our Tennis Staff **Ivor Topon**

AT LAST this country has a first class roof that can compete with the very best roofs around the world.



Roof mania

Yes, it's really true, after all the years of waiting, British roof-lovers have finally got a roof to cheer for.

Said one delighted spectator, "Come on, Roof!"

And when the moment came, the Roof performed brilliantly and went all the way. It didn't falter. It didn't fail. It didn't give up in the early stages.

Anyone for roofing?

No, the Roof eased its way effortlessly across Centre Court to deliver what the crowds were waiting for – a world-beating British Roof that we could all get behind and be proud of.

On other pages
- Roof wins BBC Sports Personality of the Year **p2**
- Roof to be given MBE **p3**
- The girl who tamed the Roof **p94**

(That's enough, Ed)

WHAT YOU MISSED

Imagine
BBC One

Profile of one of Britain's greatest living arts presenters, Alan Botney, with some rare footage of David Hockney and lots of not very rare footage of Alan Botney nodding, driving around in his car, walking down corridors and trying to avoid filming the subject of his programme because *he* wants to be on telly instead.

Don't miss the marvellous scene where Botney dips into his pension pot and paints himself an extremely rosy million-pound future.

Glasto Highlights
All BBC channels all the time

All the top Glasto names live from the pyramid stage including:

- Alan and the Botneys
- The Pensioners
- The Boss (A. Yentob)

Book at Bedtime
Radio 4

The Pleasures and Sorrows of Work by Alan de Botney.

The BBC's cultural supremo reflects on the consolations of doing whatever you like all day at the BBC and receiving an enormous *(That's enough Botney, Ed)*

Late News

SHOCK NATIONALISATION

THE Government last night announced it was stepping in to nationalise a bottomless pit.

"We believe that this bottomless pit will prove to be a good longterm investment for the taxpayer, as we pour billions of extra pounds of public money directly into it.

"We hope to sell the bottomless pit at a later date back to the private sector at a knock-down price to maximise the losses incurred by the taxpayer."

GOVERNMENT 'ANNOUNCES SCRAPPAGE SCHEME'

THE Government has confirmed that in an effort to kick start the economy it will offer £2,000 for every Blairite policy over ten years old which it now scraps.

"This means that ID cards and Royal Mail privatisation might not be as worthless as they seem after all," said a well-placed Downing Street *(cont. p. 94)*

Nursery Times

Friday, July 10, 2009

PETER PAN DEAD

by **Snow Black**

NEVERLAND was in mourning last night as news broke that Peter Pan, the boy who never wanted to grow up, had died.

Peter was greatly loved by generations of children whom he had entertained with his adventures amongst the stars (including the first star on the right).

But amidst the outpouring of grief there were some reservations about Peter's darker side. Said longterm friend Wendy Darling, 75, "People do go on about Peter hanging around nurseries and taking people's children, but I think it's time to forget all that Lost Boy stuff and remember instead the pleasure he gave us by flying around, fighting Captain Hook and moonwalking the plank."

Reports from Neverland insiders claimed that Peter had not been well and had become "a shadow of his former self".

Said close confidante Tinkerbell, 87, "In recent months he had become obsessed with the idea that he was Michael Jackson".

On other pages

● Captain Hook to sue Abercrombie & Fitch over "Discrimination" **2**

● Big Bad Wolf huffs and puffs before contracting Swine Flu and dying **3**

● Protest grows over Toad's plans to build windfarm in the willows **94**

From Gnome Souvenirs

THE MICHAEL JACKSON MEMORIAL PLATE

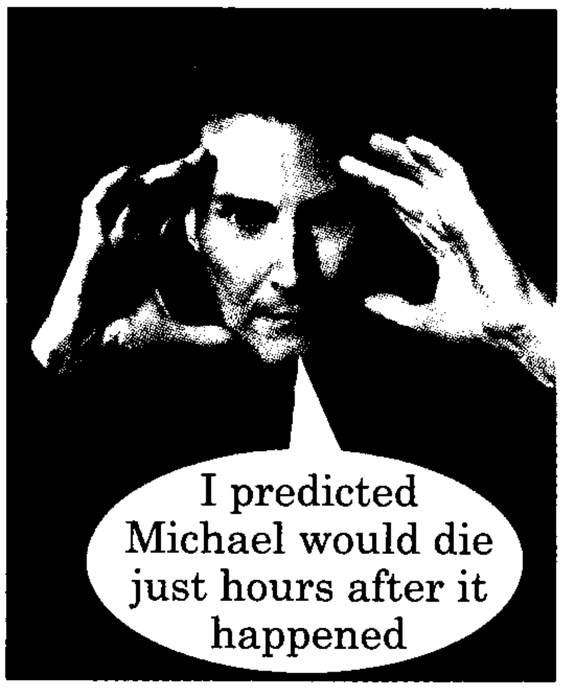
FOLLOWING the tragic death of the world's greatest ever popular performer, the Gnome Memorial Plate Company is delighted and honoured and privileged to offer readers a chance to purchase this unique souvenir of the passing of Michael Jackson. This very wonderful portrait is the work of the world's most renowned plateologist, Sir Rodolpho Stoddie, and has been handcrafted by the world's most gifted ceramicists, working in the traditional porcelain factories of Hua-ko Ja-ko Province in China.

In years to come, your Michael Jackson plate will not only be a heartwarming memento of the world's most-loved entertainer, it will be a unique investment opportunity to be passed down to your children and grandchildren and their live-in partners, adopted step-children from Malawi, the lad sleeping in the spare room (who no one's sure who he is) and anyone else that happens to be around.

WARNING: The Jackson Plate is a delicate work of art. You should not put it in the dishwasher or expose it to strong light as there is a possibility that the singer's face could turn black.

Send £399.99 now to Jacko Plate Offer, The Gnome Novelty Plate Co., Unit D, The Silver Oak Industrial Estate, Harlow MJ94 10U.

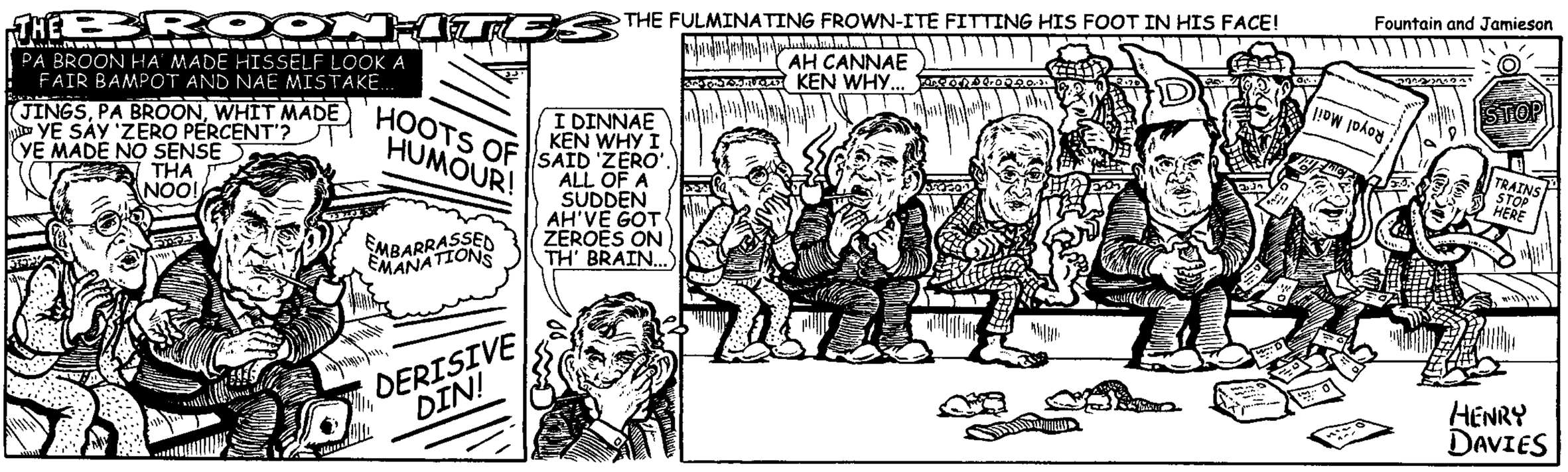
URI GELLER 'PREMONITION CLAIM'



EXCLUSIVE

WAS JACKO MURDERED?

No.


THE BROON-ITES
PA BROON HA' MADE HISSELF LOOK A FAIR BAMPOT AND NAE MISTAKE...
JINGS, PA BROON, WHIT MADE YE SAY 'ZERO PERCENT'? YE MADE NO SENSE THA NOO!
HOOTS OF HUMOUR!
EMBARRASSED EMANATIONS
DERISIVE DIN!
I DINNAE KEN WHY I SAID 'ZERO'. ALL OF A SUDDEN AH'VE GOT ZEROES ON TH' BRAIN...
THE FULMINATING FROWN-ITE FITTING HIS FOOT IN HIS FACE!
Fountain and Jamieson
AH CANNAE KEN WHY...
Royal Mail
STOP
TRAINS STOP HERE
HENRY DAVIES

THE Sun
Friday, July 10, 2009

INSIDE: SEX SECRETS OF THE SWINE FLU LOVELIES

SHOW SOME RESPECT, MA'AM!

IT IS now over ten days since the entire world was stunned, shocked and grief-stricken by the tragic death of the greatest artist of his or any other time.

All the world's leaders have paid their tributes. President Obama led the way by saying that he was a truly unique inspiration to Americans of every colour – black, white and both at once.

General Sir Wacko Jackson

Our own prime minister Gordon Brown expressed his "deep and personal sorrow" at the passing of "an iconic icon".

The leader of the opposition, David Cameron, said. "I've got all his music on my i-Pod. I'm a pretty 'with it' kind of guy."

Both the Pope and the Ayatollah Khomeini are believed to have offered special prayers.

Yet one world leader has remained heartlessly silent and aloof, as the rest of humanity dissolved in a veritable tsunami of grief.

Step forward the Queen of England, Her Royal Callousness, Elizabeth the Second.

Once again, she completely misreads the public mood and refuses to lower the flag over Buckingham Palace to half mast, as all her subjects would have wished.

And why did she not even do something as obvious and simple as open a book of condolences in Westminster Abbey for the many millions of fans to show their last respects?

Princess Diana Ross

At a time when we are being asked to pay millions of pounds for the upkeep of this 80-year relic of snobbish feudalism, surely she could give him the posthumous knighthood which this incomparable artist so richly deserved.

Arise, Sir Michael, from your grave, and live on to entertain us for ever.

As for you, Your Majesty, you have obviously learned nothing from your betrayal of Princess Jade.

Shame on you, Ma'am.

The man who was embarrassed about his colour

by The Late MICHAEL JACKSON

FOR MANY of his fans it was the ultimate betrayal. When Gordon Brown decided that he could no longer be red and would turn himself blue they were dismayed. But it was clear that after years of self-mutilation Gordon had determinedly changed his face completely.

Said one observer, "He shed all the signs of redness and could easily have been taken for a blue man."

His Tory

But friends of Gordon defended him. "It is unfair to say that Gordon used to be red. He has always been blue inside. Even as a young man people would point to him and say, 'When he is older his colour will change and he will end up as a close friend of Sir Fred Goodwin'."

Exclusive Eye Picture Probe

When Tragedy Hit Planet Earth, Where Were You?

JOCASTA BALON, 22, hair stylist from Neasden. "My mum texted me at the salon – Michael Jackson's dead. I couldn't believe it. I told all the customers. They couldn't believe it either. It was unbelievable."

ANWAT BHAJI, 52, Balti House proprietor, also from Neasden, "I was watching television at the back of the restaurant, with my brother-in-law it came on as a newsflash. Michael Jackson is dead. 'Who's he?' said my brother-in-law. I couldn't believe it. It was unbelievable."

MELANIE MELDEW, 47, mother of three, also from Neasden, "The first I knew about it was when my son asked to borrow some money. 'Have you heard, Mum,' he said, 'the king of pop is dead.' I immediately put on Thriller and listened to it all morning. It was unbelievable. I couldn't believe it."

TRISH NOBBINGTON, 19, student at the University of Neasden (formerly World of Carpets). "We were in our tent at Glasto and one of the blokes from the tent next door came over and said, 'Have you heard, Jacko has passed on?' None of us could believe it, but Amy checked on her iPhone and there it was. We couldn't believe it. We immediately put Thriller on our iPods as a tribute and danced in the mud. It was unbelievable."

REGINALD VOLETROUSER, 75, retired philatelist from Neasden-on-the-Hill. "You were kind enough to ask me where I was when this chap died. I'm terribly sorry, I don't know who he is or, for that matter, who I am. It's unbelievable, I know, I can't believe it either."

Now you can tell us where you were when the world changed forever.

Just text, email or twitter your moving personal account and we'll use it to fill up our special 94-page Michael Jackson supplement, free with every copy of tomorrow's Eye.

What you read in all newspapers

MY FRIEND MICHAEL

by P. Brandy Umberelli

MICHAEL AND I became friends nearly 40 years ago. He was just a troubled kid, with a lot of problems.

But you could see at once that he also had one helluva lot of talent.

Over the years, I came to realise that behind the troubled façade was a warm, sensitive, loving, kindly, generous, warm human being.

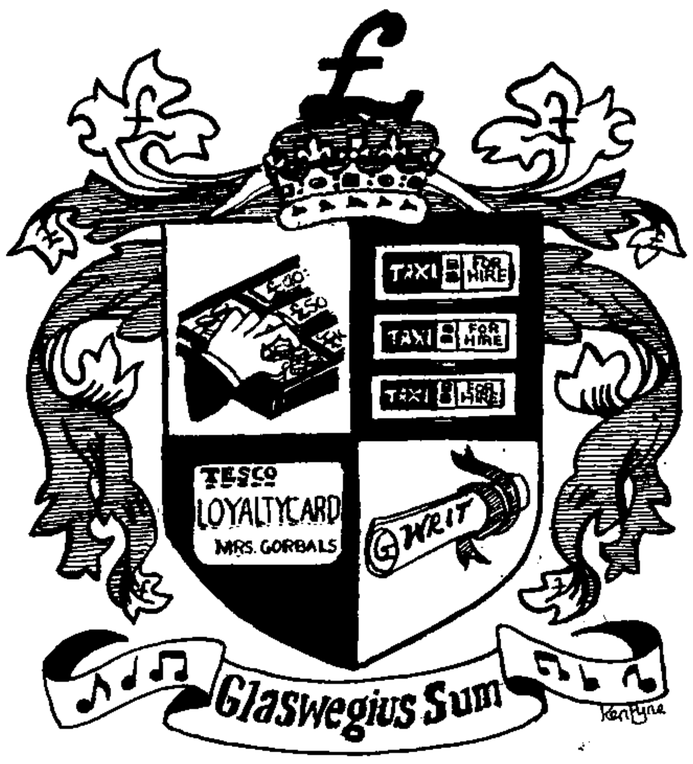
What can I say? I just wish I had met him. And now it's too late.

What you didn't read in all newspapers

MAD PAEDOPHILE DEAD

YESTERDAY a 50-year-old mentally ill paedophile died in America.

Ex-Speaker Martin Chooses His Coat Of Arms



SHORTLY to be ennobled as Lord Gorbals of Sleaze, Mr Michael Martin has informed the College of Heralds to draw up his coat of arms as follows.

A shield quartered, bearing the following heraldic motifs:

1. A hand rampant gules in a till sable.

2. A trio of taxi meters bearing the legend 'For Hire'.

3. A Tesco loyalty card in the name of Mrs Gorbals.

4. A hand-inscribed libel writ drafted by Messrs Carter-Fuck, Solicitors and Commisioners of Oaths.

Beneath this shall appear Lord Gorbals's chosen motto, "Glaswegius Sum" enshrined on a musical stave.

Gordon Ramsay's Menu in Full

Potato Skints

Egg on Face

Belly up of Pork (on a bed of own making)

Burnt Fingers of Fish

Cooked Goose

Going Down the Pan Fried Turkey

Steak Ta Ta

-*-

From the trolley:

Bomb Surprise

Fool

Stewed Pearshapes

Hard Cheese Board (including Roqueefinances and In-the-Red Leicester)

Not-in-the-Black Forest Gateau

-*-

To drink:

Baillif's Irish Cream

Jacobs Shit Creek 2009

"And stay out of the sun or you won't live long enough to die of swine flu this autumn"

*"Of **course** they won't want it back"*

"He seems agitated"

From The Message Boards

Members of the online community respond to the major issues of the day...

Ashes fever!

Seeing as this is baggy green central, I wondered what fellow Aussies make of the Poms this year? – ***Stevo***

if Flintoffs fit and in form they got a chance. – ***Brett_B***

England fan in peace! Sorry to intrude but I just want to wish you guys the best of luck. – ***Bogbrush***

mate, do yourself a favour and fuck off this thread. – ***Brett_B***

jesus what kind of stupid prick calls himself bogbrush? – ***Warneys_Wig***

Not my real name lol! They pushed my head down the bog at school and the nickname stuck worst luck! – ***Bogbrush***

hey shithead stick your head back down the toilet so i can take a dump on it – ***Pride_of_Perth***

bogbrush you bunch of useless deadshit's have got as much chance of winning the ash's as you got of losing your virginety loooooza! – ***Bowlin_Shane***

earth to bogbrush – go fuck yerself dickhead – ***Dogs_of_Waugh***

Great stuff guys! This kind of banter is what makes the Ashes so special. Shame we can't all meet up for a beer. – ***Bogbrush***

G'day Bogbrush. Look forward to that drink – ***King_of_The_Hill***

I'll drink to that! – ***Bogbrush***

You're on mate, and good on you for not taking offence at my little joke. – ***King_of_The_Hill***

None taken! In fact I didn't notice anything offensive in your post. – ***Bogbrush***

My mistake mate, I must have accidentally deleted the offensive bit. It should have read: Look forward to that drink so I can piss in your glass. – ***King_of_The_Hill***

I see. Thanks for telling me anyway. – ***Bogbrush***

No worries cunt. – ***King_of_The_Hill***

DIARY

MICHAEL JACKSON AND ME

Barack Obama
There is no song in this world that can be sung if there is no singer to sing that song. And when that song comes to be sung, it is the singer who may lay claim to have been singing the song that is sung.

This is the lesson – a lesson of hope, a lesson of renewal, a lesson both real and true – that the late Michael Jackson taught this world of yours and this world of mine: this world of ours.

"Ben, the two of us need look no more. We both found what we were looking for."

What were Ben and Michael looking for? It is now too late to ask. As a nation, it is our destiny never to know. But whatever it was, let us hope they found what they were looking for. Whatever *they* were looking for, let us, as a nation, hope they found.

Germaine Greer
The surprise is not that we have lost him, but that we ever had him at all. I never had him – not my type – but that doesn't mean others didn't. He touched a lot of young people in a lot of different ways.

The sudden death of this Dionysos, this Orpheus, this Midas, this Canute, this Colossus, is a strange kind of victory. Instead of entering middle age and letting himself be chained to earth, Michael has floated away like a wisp, annihilated on the brink of a 50-date concert tour that I for one was dreading.

I wasn't there for Michael when he died, and that's something I'll always regret. I would have held him to my chest and kissed him, not so as to revive him – his young heart did not want to grow old – but so as to let him know that he was cherished, just as Persephone was cherished, and Ulysses too. And we might have taken one final dance together, Michael and I, with Michael clutched to my bosom like Clytemnestra.

But it was not to be. Michael is no more. Yet in another way, he is with us for all time. When I sing, it will be Michael singing. When I dance, it will be Michael dancing. Whenever I touch people, it will be Michael touching people.

The Rt Hon Gordon Brown
To me, Michael Jackson was a legendary entertainer and perhaps above all, a keen supporter of policy of reinvestment in people to help cope with this unavoidable economic downturn coupled with a renewed awareness of the need to rebuild our society for the 21st century. The man gave us the Moondance, in which he appeared to move backwards but went nowhere. He is a continued inspiration to us all.

Max Clifford
Mike was a lovely, lovely bloke. I first met him when he was a complete unknown. He came to me as a tot, a lovely little tot, and he said to me "Max, I want to become the world's biggest star pursued by demons before dying tragically aged 50." I said to him "Michael," I said, "Michael, leave it to your Uncle Max."

The rest is the proverbial history. Back then, he didn't have the foggiest how to sing and dance. Not the foggiest. He had two left feet and a squeaky little voice. But I taught him those fantastic steps, and gave him a lesson or two in singing. Result? The whole world adored him before going off him and then he tragically perished.

Yes, I made the man what he is today.

Now all we are left with is cherished memories of Michael and, between ourselves, fantastic video footage of his autopsy. Give us a bell soonest, and we'll see if we can come up with a deal. Ciao!

A.S. Byatt
His was a truly extraordinary talent and, in a curious way, one which should be judged as, in a curious way, truly extraordinary, by which I mean that in some sort of extraordinary way, some sort of way that is, in a very real sense, truly extraordinary, he was, in a curious way, really quite extraordinarily extraordinary.

Clive James
Jackson could dance like there was no tomorrow, and, like no tomorrow, he could dance. His moonwalk was the walk that made you moan. And then it made you walk. When he walked on the moon, it was as if the moon itself could walk. He sang "Got to be There", and there is where he had got to be. And even when he was not all there, he was certainly here. Now he is no longer here, but hear him we still can. He longed to heal the world, and it was on his heels that for so long he whirled.

David Cameron
It was a truly terrible shock to learn of the death of Michael Jackson. We have lost a tremendous talent and a great friend to the Conservative Party. I know that, if he were still alive, Michael would have joined me in condemning this increasingly incompetent and lacklustre government. I hope now that all parties can come together and join in a General Election as a mark of respect to this hugely talented guy.

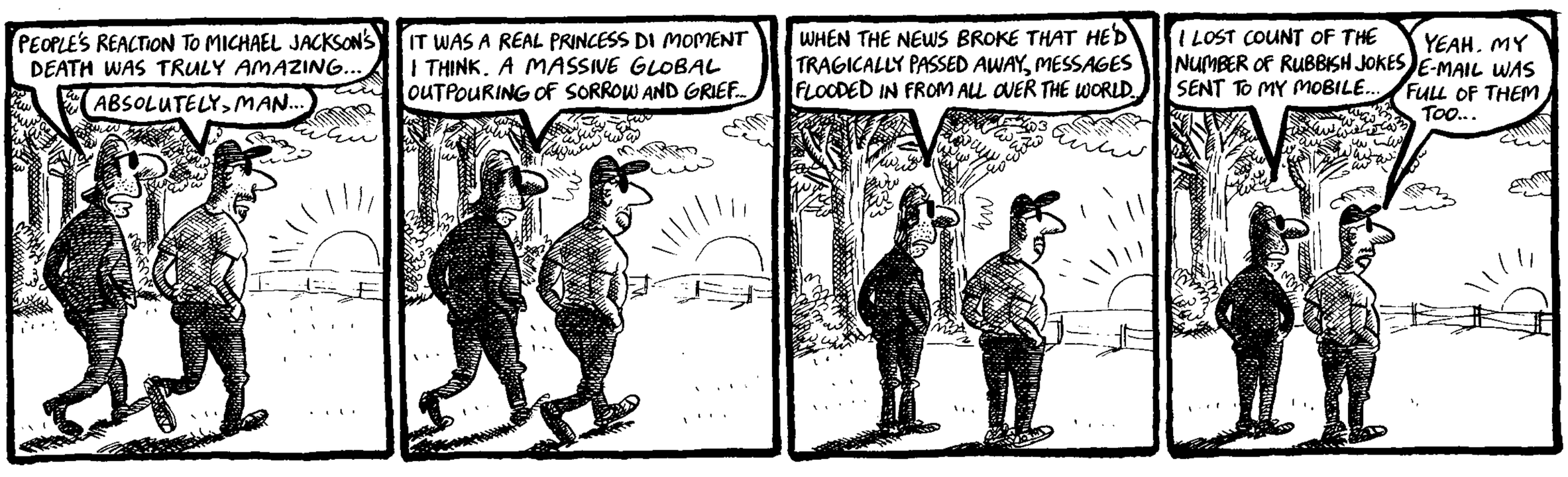
Yasmin Alibhai-Brown
Michael Jackson has died. On that we may agree. His dancing may have been his way of reminding us that his talent and wealth gave him no freedom. The views of childhood he promulgated were weird and murky – part idealised, part appallingly overprotective and paranoid. British parents can, with impunity, hit and terrorise their children as long as there are no marks on the flesh. It is barbaric that children are still goods owned by a clan. He who built Neverland did not give full recognition and respect to children, and nor, sadly, does the world. Not yet. On that we may agree.

William Rees-Mogg
It is fair, in my opinion, to say that Michael Jackson – one of the Indiana Jacksons – will soon get over this latest setback to his career. He has never allowed himself to be the victim of trauma or neurosis. He is, by all accounts, a robust and healthy young man, with a pleasingly straightforward outlook on life. It seems clear to me that, despite his reported death, he has rarely been in better shape. All the signs suggest that he will bring renewed vigour and panache to the fifty-or-so concerts he has planned for the O2 arena. Some commentators have predicted the cancellation of some or all of these concerts. My own view is that his premature death, such as it is, will interfere very little, if at all, with his innovative and undeniably popular song-and-dance routines.

As told to
CRAIG BROWN

Celeb

LIGGER


PEOPLE'S REACTION TO MICHAEL JACKSON'S DEATH WAS TRULY AMAZING...
ABSOLUTELY, MAN...
IT WAS A REAL PRINCESS DI MOMENT I THINK. A MASSIVE GLOBAL OUTPOURING OF SORROW AND GRIEF...
WHEN THE NEWS BROKE THAT HE'D TRAGICALLY PASSED AWAY, MESSAGES FLOODED IN FROM ALL OVER THE WORLD.
I LOST COUNT OF THE NUMBER OF RUBBISH JOKES SENT TO MY MOBILE...
YEAH. MY E-MAIL WAS FULL OF THEM TOO...

Literary Review

Stars in his eyes

David Niven: The Man Behind The Balloon

Michael Munn

(JR Books £17.99)

WHO is Michael Munn? According to his publishers, he's a "writer, actor, director and former journalist and Hollywood publicist" – and a close friend of the late David Niven, the subject of his latest biography.

The book is so sensational that the *Sunday Times* serialised it for two weeks and ran a separate news story: "Dying Niven Confessed to Suicide Bid. A new book reveals the dark side of the Hollywood star famed for his light-hearted approach to life."

If Munn and the *Sunday Times* are to be believed, shortly before his demise in 1982 the debonair actor summoned the author, who had also been his publicist, for a deathbed confession. "I need to see you, Mike," he said. "And bring a tape recorder." He revealed that he had tried to kill himself after the death of his first wife, but the gun failed to go off. He also spoke of his affairs with Marilyn Monroe, Grace Kelly and Princess Margaret, his suspicions about the identity of his real father, and his second wife's fling with John F. Kennedy.

All of which came as a surprise to Niven's sons, David Jnr and Jamie. Neither has ever heard of Munn, their father's allegedly intimate friend. Nor has anyone from Rogers & Cowan, who were Niven's London publicists. Nor has veteran showbiz columnist Roddy Mann, Niven's best surviving Hollywood friend. Nor has Niven's previous biographer, Graham Lord, who interviewed most of the actor's inner circle for his book *Niv*, published in 2003. Lord also noticed, when sent Munn's book for review by the *Daily Telegraph*, that much of it seemed to have been lifted from his own work. He pointed this out in his review, but the *Telegraph* declined to print it.

The *Sunday Times* can't say it wasn't warned. Its arts correspondent, who interviewed Munn a few years ago in connection with another showbiz feature, advised the paper to have nothing to do with him. When *Sunday Times* hack Maurice Chittenden rang Jamie Niven while writing the news story, he was told: "If ever there was a guy least likely to commit suicide, it was my old man." Yet the paper went ahead regardless, paying Munn a handsome fee.

The story of a deathbed confession seems rather unlikely, given that David Niven suffered from motor neurone disease in his final years, which made him slur his words so much that what he said was largely incomprehensible. So where are the tapes of his remarkably lucid and candid confession? Munn says that they were "chewed up" by his machine long ago – but, fortunately, he transcribed them. David Niven Junior is unconvinced. As he told the *Daily Mail*: "Everyone featured in these stories is rather conveniently dead, so we can't ask them to verify them."

Which, it transpires, is often the case with Munn's showbiz biographies, all issued by the second-division London publisher Robson Books (now known as JR Books). In *John Wayne: The Man Behind the Myth* (2003), he claimed that as a 21-year-old film publicist he wangled his way on to the set of *Brannigan*, the Duke's one British picture, made in 1974, and struck up a close friendship.

In *Lord Larry* (2007) he claimed to have befriended Laurence Olivier in 1972, while still a teenager. The big news here was that Olivier allegedly confessed to Munn that he had been sexually abused during his childhood – something that none of his family or biographers had ever heard of.

In *Richard Burton: Prince of Players* (2008), he claimed to have been a confidant of Burton from 1969 (when the 16-year-old Munn met him on a school trip to Shepperton) until his death 15 years later – a relationship that had unaccountably been ignored by all previous biographers of Burton. "You shall be Mick to me," Burton told him at their first encounter, "and I shall be Dick to you." A sign of particular intimacy, clearly: all Burton's other chums knew him as Rich.

The most startling example of Munn's irresistible appeal to screen icons came in *Sinatra: The Untold Story* (2001), which claimed that Marilyn Monroe was murdered by the mafia. His source for this was Frank Sinatra's ex-wife Ava Gardner, who seduced the teenage messenger-boy Munn in 1969 while she was staying in London. "Despite her being almost 30 years older, she took an immediate shine to me and before long we were having clandestine meetings at a Knightsbridge hotel... Ava decided, for reasons of her own which I never fully understood, that I should know everything about Marilyn Monroe's death."

One day, when Sinatra rang Gardner, she handed the phone to Munn. "I hear Ava's been telling you things you shouldn't know," Old Blue Eyes said. Munn had to swear not to reveal them while Sinatra was alive. "Remember what Frank said," Ava told Munn afterwards. "Maybe in time, when you're an old man and me and Frank are dust, you might feel the time is right to let others know." By the time he did, they were indeed both dust – just like David Niven, Richard Burton, Laurence Olivier ("You may call me Lord Larry") and other stars who entrusted Munn with their innermost secrets shortly before pegging out.

So who is this self-styled "writer, actor, director"? His script-writing credits consist of *Leg Before Wildebeest*, a play about a cricket team's chucklesome mishaps in Africa, and a version of *Dick Whittington* – both written in the 1990s for the amateur dramatic group in Sudbury, Suffolk, where Munn lives.

As for the acting, according to a biography on the Internet Movie Database, submitted by Munn himself, he appeared as an extra (uncredited) in a couple of British TV dramas and the film of *Nineteen Eighty-Four*. More recently, although he is too modest to mention it, he appeared in the Boxford Drama Group's production of *Same Time, Next Year* at Boxford village hall, near Sudbury. Hooray for Hollywood!

Sarah Waters

BOOKS & BOOKMEN

■ THE BBC Samuel Johnson Prize for Non-fiction, awarded last week to Philip Hoare for *Leviathan*, shows every sign of being a prize being deliberately unloved.

This year the purse was pettily reduced by £10,000, a sum dwarfed by top BBC execs' expenses claims. The judges' chairman, Jacob Weisberg, was an American pundit who is little-known even among well-read Brits.

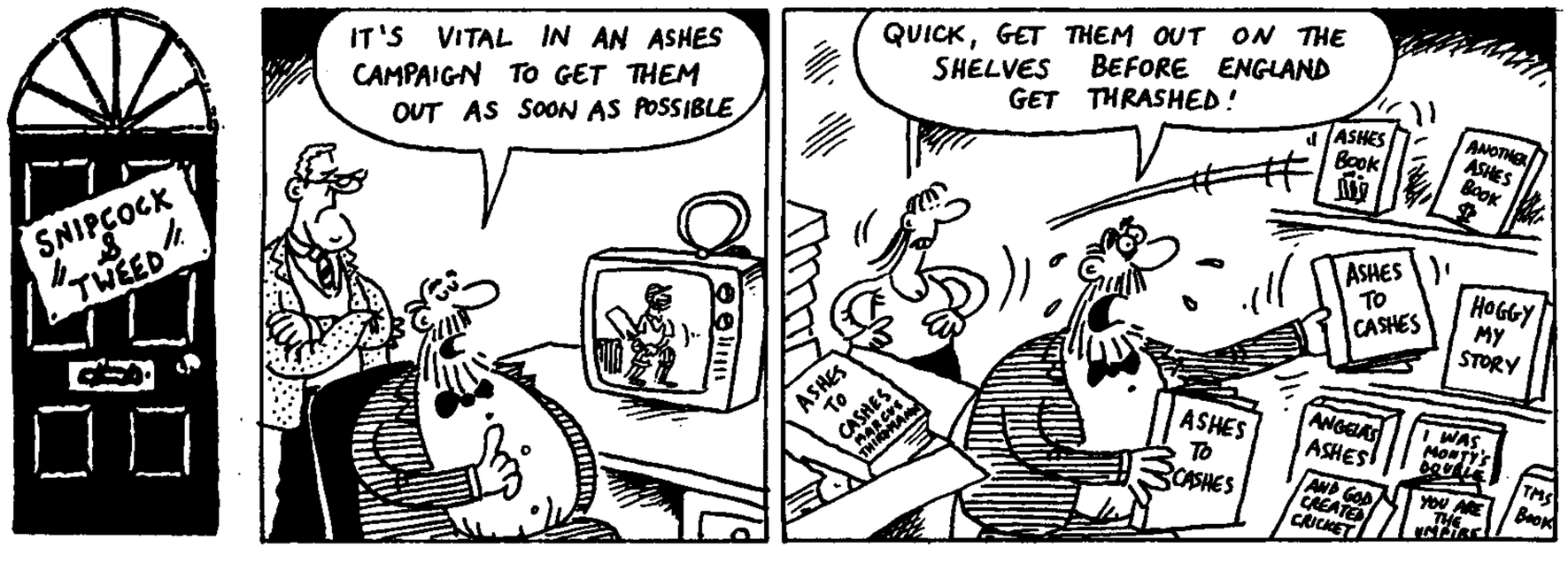
As well as the longlist appearing late, the preview programmes of past years gave way this year to a single BBC2 show, sheepishly stuffed away in the late-night slot after *Newsnight* rather than aired in mid-evening to coincide with the actual awarding of the prize. Hoare did not appear on the following day's *Today* programme, despite the prize being BBC-sponsored; and few news bulletins mentioned the result.

How things have come to this is hard to understand. Non-fiction dominates newspapers' shrinking books sections, with novelists wailing as fiction is squeezed out whenever editors lose pages. Yet while there are dozens of competing novel awards, the Samuel Johnson is unchallenged – it alone encompasses the whole spectrum, rivalled only by narrower awards that restrict entry to biographers (Costa), debutants (Guardian), historians (Wolfson) or science writers (Royal Society).

This very bagginess could be its problem, or maybe it's the unsexiness of the term non-fiction, something defined by what it isn't. If the BBC is to get behind the prize and help it survive perhaps rebranding it will be necessary. Reality lit, anyone?

■ HOARE's real name is Patrick Moore, and, barring an extraordinary coincidence, he has a naughty secret.

A London-based Amazon reviewer of an earlier Hoare book, *England's Other Eden*, praised it in extravagant terms in 2007: "I doubt if I'll read anything better this year. The first thing to say is how beautifully Philip Hoare writes; what a pleasure to read such clear and lovely English. But besides this, what really makes this book so


SNIPCOCK & TWEED
IT'S VITAL IN AN ASHES CAMPAIGN TO GET THEM OUT AS SOON AS POSSIBLE
QUICK, GET THEM OUT ON THE SHELVES BEFORE ENGLAND GET THRASHED!
ASHES BOOK
ANOTHER ASHES BOOK
ASHES TO ASHES
HOGGY MY STORY
ASHES TO ASHES MARCUS TRESCOTHICK
ASHES TO ASHES
ANGELAS ASHES
I WAS MONTY'S DOUBLE
AND GOD CREATED CRICKET
YOU ARE THE UMPIRE
THIS BOOK

special is the seamless way that the author weaves together his several narratives and I was very moved by his linking of a personal history to this extraordinary period. Strongly recommended."

The fan's name? Pat Moore.

Sadly for "Pat", another Amazon reviewer, Narjit Gill, helpfully pointed out on the site: "This review is the one that I posted on the 16th August 2001 for Philip Hoare's *Spike Island*." And indeed it is, word for word. Still, what's wrong with a little plagiarism between fellow fans?

■ WHEN it was still run by its founder Tim Waterstone, Waterstone's would not have based an advert on a, er, bit of a porky. But these are hard times for booksellers – so much so that the chain that Tim built has toyed with making all books three-for-two.

And so Waterstone's took out a full-page ad in the *Sunday Times* at the weekend promoting its discount price on Aravind Adiga's *Between the Assassinations*, proclaiming it in giant lettering "the new novel from the Man Booker winner". Of course it isn't (even Atlantic, Adiga's publishers, also aware that bitty books sell less well, limit themselves to coyly calling it "a new work of fiction"), and the bookseller's fib was exposed by Peter Parker's review a few pages away in the same issue: "Aravind Adiga's new book consists of short stories," he began, no doubt inducing choral groaning in every Waterstone's branch.

■ FEARS that the *Daily Telegraph* was downgrading its coverage of books after jettisoning literary editor Sam Leith last December are groundless, if the title's keen interest in *Dead Spy Walking*, a new thriller from Harper Collins is anything to go by.

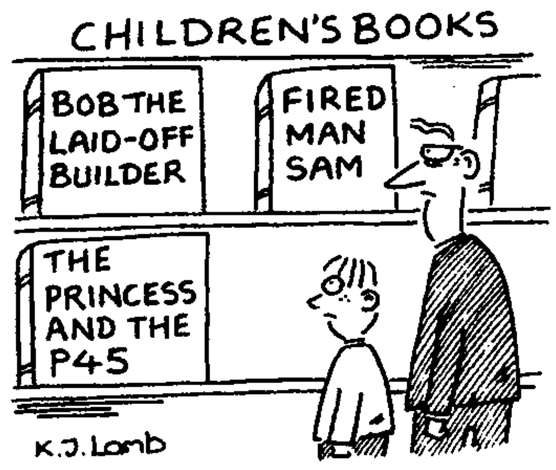
A generous review – "Hollywood has snapped up this corking thriller" – was followed in the paper by 1,250 words from the author Jon Stock detailing his research into genuine MI6 operatives. Further delights, meanwhile, awaited online: a lengthy account of Stock's writing methods with accompanying four-and-a-half minute video, ten minutes of him reading out extracts in audio, a further four-and-a-half minutes of video billed as "Jon Stock, author of *Dead Spy Running*... standing outside the MI6 building in Vauxhall".

This enthusiasm may or may not be related to the fact that Jon Stock is the "head of lifestyle" for the *Telegraph*'s digital operations and editor of the paper's Weekend section.

■ SUNDAY'S *Observer* offered a guide to "the 50 best summer reads ever... the timeless novels that will turn the most restful holiday into an exotic adventure".

The likes of Sagan, Fitzgerald, Barnes, Forster and Murdoch duly figured – but Ros Wynne-Jones? Chosen by Rosie Boycott, under whom Wynne-Jones worked as a journalist at both the *Independent on Sunday* and the *Express*, *Something Is Going to Fall Like Rain* deals in Boycott's words with "the horrors, brutality and famine that descended on southern Sudan at the end of the 90s". Perfect beach reading, then...

■ "WHY do we believe that what we do for a living is what makes us worthwhile people?" asked Alain de Botton in the *London Evening Standard* (6 July 2009). De Botton, the infamous writer of numerous philosophical tracts, recently came to learn first hand *"The Pleasure and Sorrow of Work"*.



Following a mediocre review of his latest book in the *New York Times* – Caleb Crain commented that the book "provided entertainment, if not analysis" – De Botton fired off a proportional response: "I will hate you until the day I die, and wish you nothing but ill will in every career move you make."

Perhaps Monsieur De Botton ought to take his own advice from the closing lines of the article: "When work is not going well, we need to remember to distinguish our sense of worth from the work we do." He may be worthless as an author, but he is still valuable as a human being.

'Bookworm'

"Have you seen how overdue this book is?"

LIBRARY NEWS

■ BIZARRE goings-on in Nottingham, where a campaign began to save the popular Beechdale Library from first-aiders – even though they aren't trying to buy the building at all.

Nottingham city council started consulting last month on closing the library, with local press reporting that the city had received an "unsolicited offer" from St John Ambulance, expressing an interest in buying the building and neighbouring offices for a new training centre. The council promised that any money raised would be put back into library services in the city, but readers in Beechdale were outraged. The tiny branch library has limited opening hours but still attracts 26,000 visitors a year.

But St John Ambulance told the *Eye* it had never offered to buy the building and was no longer interested in the neighbouring building either. "In 2008 we were considering taking a lease on Beechdale Court. As part of our investigations we enquired of the council about their future plans for the neighbouring building," said Roger Hursthouse, chairman of the St John Council for Nottinghamshire. "As a charity working in health and education, we support community facilities such as libraries, and would not want to cause the closure of Beechdale Road Library. We have never made an offer for the Beechdale Road Library building. We decided not to acquire the lease of Beechdale Court, and now have no plans to acquire any properties in Beechdale."

Cllr Dave Trimble, Nottingham's portfolio holder for leisure, insisted the charity *had* enquired about buying the library site, saying: "We always realised their interest would be dependent on them being able to secure the lease of the building next door and we have just heard this week that has now not been possible."

However, the library's future still isn't safe, as Cllr Trimble told the *Eye* the city was considering its future. "It has always been about the number of library users and its lack of potential for development of library services," he said.

NUMBER CRUNCHING

1 Days before official publication date that government obtained injunction to ban Andy Hayman's *The Terrorist Hunters*

2,000 Words in serialisation of *The Terrorist Hunters* that had already appeared in national newspaper

100 Percentage of national newspapers which had already received review copies of *The Terrorist Hunters*

Pseuds Corner

"Ever since Dionysos danced ahead of his horde of bloody-footed maenads across the rocky highlands of prehistoric Greece, dance and song have been the province of boys. Like Orpheus, Jackson was destroyed by his fans... Nijinksy may have been the greatest Spectre de la Rose, Nureyev the greatest Corsair, but these two candles pale in the light of Jackson's blazing star. The surprise is not that we have lost him, but that we ever had him at all."

Germaine Greer, *Guardian*

"I think of him dying with a thousand arrows in his chest."

Lemn Sissay, *Guardian*

"Jackson's face fascinated me. It was a face that reminded me of Nijinsky; of the eccentric socialite the Marchesa Casati, she of the anorexic torso, lipstick-slashed lips and jet-black eyelashes; of Alla Nazimova, Rudolph Valentino's mistress, in her grotesque silent screen adaptation of Wilde's Salome; of Valentino himself; of the tragic, elegant Beast played by Jean Marais in La Belle et la Bête; of Barbette, the transvestite acrobat celebrated by that film's director, Jean Cocteau; of virtually any of Fellini's characters; of one of those androgynous ephebes who haunt the unreadable and now unread contes cruels of Jean Lorrain and James Branch Cabell; of Dorian Gray, not as painted by Wilde's fictitious portraitist, Basil Hallward, but as photographed by, let's say, Cecil Beaton; of, finally, the Mona Lisa, not at all as painted by Leonardo but rather as rhapsodised by Walter Pater in a celebrated purple passage..."

Gilbert Adair, *Guardian*

"At the press conference earlier this year to promote his London concerts, the few words Jackson consented to utter were chosen with care, and they might have been a direct translation from the Latin Vulgate of St John. 'This is it,' he said, 'this is really it, this is the final curtain call.' With the addition of the theatrical metaphor, these are the last words of Christ, who announced his expiry by gasping, 'Consummatum est.'"

Peter Conrad, *Observer*

"The Beatles may have transcended the Cold War by singing Yeah, Yeah, Yeah, but when Michael Jackson did the Moonwalk, the world became a different place."

Pete Waterman, *Express*

CONTRIBUTORS: Everyone

IN THE BACK

TAX AVOIDANCE

Taking the Michael

THE chairman of the Audit Commission – motto "protecting the public purse" – has himself short-changed the public purse by millions of pounds through an elaborate tax avoidance scheme, *Private Eye* can reveal.

Michael O'Higgins (pictured) was appointed to one of the most senior positions guarding taxpayers' money in 2006 after 10 years as managing partner at the management consultancy, PA Consulting. He ran the public services, which earns a fortune advising on everything from health services to ID cards.

In 1999 his firm received a call from Bill Field, a tax avoidance specialist with accountancy firm Ernst & Young who had a cunning plan for all PA staff to dodge tax on their substantial annual bonuses. The call would lead to an intricate tax avoidance scheme that has only now been exposed in a tax tribunal.

"The proposal," explained the tribunal, "was to re-route bonuses awarded to employees so that they were paid as dividends" (which would be taxed more lightly). But the greedy tax dodgers also wanted the payments tax deductible for PA Holdings Ltd so they would slash its tax bill too, which ruled out simply paying dividends from the company.

Field came up with a ruse to pull off a double whammy. At the end of 1999, PA made a tax-deductible payment of £24m to a Jersey trust, Mourant, which then handed the money to a Jersey-registered but British tax-resident company called Ellastone Ltd. In return Mourant took shares in Ellastone; and in March 2000 awarded them to deserving PA employees who immediately became entitled to dividends that happily equated to their bonuses. The wheeze earned Ernst & Young a tidy £355,000, plus unspecified further payments when the scheme was repeated in the following two years.

The taxman insisted that for all the scheme's cleverness, the payments to PA staff should still have been subject to PAYE like any other bonuses. As HM Revenue & Customs' QC Malcolm Gammie put it: "Assume that North, East, South and West enter a room and sit at a table. North (the employer) holds cash that he has already said he will share (as an annual bonus) with West (his employee). The common understanding and intention of all concerned is that North will hand the cash to East, East will hand the cash to South and South will hand the cash to West. If the question is asked, has North paid West his annual cash bonus, the answer is quite clearly yes… The answer does not change just because North produces a pack of cards so that the cash can pass from North to East to South to West under the cover of a card game… This was effectively the 'game' that was played by the Appellant (North), the Trustees (East), Ellastone (South) and employees (West)."

Alas, the tribunal did not agree, allowing the PA consultants to avoid tax on the strict letter of the law. O'Higgins admitted to the *Eye* that his own bonuses, much of them earned from the taxpayer in the first place, were funnelled through the scheme. Over three years the sum is likely to have run into millions. And that is not the limit of his raid on the public purse that he now protects.

While O'Higgins was a managing partner, the tribunal found that "PA went out of its way to 'sell' the arrangements to employees". He would also sit on the board of the company behind the scheme, PA Holdings Ltd, for two years while it disputed it with HMRC.

All of which sits a little oddly with O'Higgins' other taxpayer-funded job as non-executive director of the Treasury, "shaping the vision, strategy and priority" of that department – which perhaps ought not to include big-time tax avoidance.

DEFENCE

Debt knell

AS EXPERTS draw up lists of defence projects to scrap in order to fill the multi-billion-pound black hole that is the Ministry of Defence, officials are quietly pressing on with the planned £12bn privatisation of military training even though they know it's unaffordable.

More than two years ago the then armed forces minister Des Browne admitted he was privatising defence training because the up-front investment needed could only be met if it was kept off-balance sheet by using the private finance initiative (even though PFI costs more in the long run – see *Eye* 1177). This meant that companies had to buy the buildings and rent them back to the MoD, complete with the training of soldiers, sailors and air crew.

A read-out from an MoD meeting seen by the *Eye* now reveals that the project is looking unaffordable precisely *because* it is a PFI deal. "Currently there is a £1.3bn affordability issue in the programme," an official reports. "The problem is borrowing money at a reasonable rate for PFI." The amount needed can't be met from the £2bn "infrastructure fund" the government has already agreed to lend to struggling PFI deals, as this is largely earmarked for schools and hospitals.

The deal, due to kick off next autumn, isn't helped by trouble with one area of military training that is to be brought in but is already privatised: naval training at HMS Sultan. Essential information from there can't be obtained "due to their ongoing political issue with [private consortium] VT Flagship". Not surprisingly the official reports gloomily: "Currently planned programme will be hard to achieve."

But the MoD is determined to press ahead, going back to parliament for approval for a further £44m in "pre-contract allocation" to cover the escalating costs of the Metrix consortium (QinetiQ, Sodexo, Raytheon, EDS and others), without which "Mx [Metrix] could walk away, although it is anticipated that they will not". Very encouraging.

● **REVOLVING DOORS**: With weapons spending under pressure, arms firms need all the lobbying help they can get – which is why Italian arms giant Finmeccanica gave not one but two jobs to one of the MoD's top buyers.

David Gould, former chief operating officer for equipment at the MoD, started working for military electronics firm Selex last November and for military consulting firm Vega this May. Finmeccanica owns both. The advisory committee on business appointments recommended Gould be barred from lobbying for 12 months. Unusually, one member dissented, presumably in favour of greater restrictions, reflecting sensitivity about the revolving door between the MoD and the arms trade.

Selex provides electronics for the Eurofighter and Joint Strike Fighter, both expensive "multi-role" jets. Meanwhile, Vega supplies IT systems management for the MoD.

● **GONGS UPDATE**: The birthday honours last month threw the spotlight on Fujitsu, part of the Atlas consortium supplying the MoD with a multi-billion-pound computer network. The system is nearly two years late and not fully working… but this didn't stop Mike Newman, boss of Fujitsu's defence unit, getting an OBE "for services to the Ministry of Defence".

Arms firm EADS Defences & Security Systems Ltd is also involved in Atlas, and chief executive Leonard Tyler also got an OBE. EADS is also working on the "FireControl" system to replace regional 999 offices with big centralised, computerised emergency call centres. FireControl is also very late and very expensive, threatening the budget needed for firefighters and fire engines.

CHARITY SPENDING

Champagne supper Novas

WHILE they were running out of cash to run hostels for the homeless, bosses at national social care charity the Novas Scarman Group (NSG) were splashing their funds on decorative woodwork and trips to Paris Fashion Week.

Nine months after a Housing Corporation inquiry was launched into NSG's alleged misuse of public funds and financial mismanagement, the group finally admitted in June that it was indeed in trouble, issuing an "unreserved apology" for its "failure to manage elements of the finances".

Novas's founder and chief executive Michael Wake took redundancy in May, accepting an £80,000 pay-off for his role in the debacle. Wake, who had been on gardening leave in Malaysia since January, was not the only one: executive director Matthew Pike swiftly followed with £32,000 redundancy. The entire board of directors has also been replaced since November, mostly at the insistence of the Housing Corporation's successor, the Tenant Services Authority (TSA). NSG said the management had been "restructured" because it was "too complex and top-heavy".

Details of the award-winning charity's fall from grace are still emerging ahead of the inquiry's final report, expected within weeks. But to some extent NSG fell victim to its own hype – investing heavily in ill-judged commercial enterprises and loss-making art galleries in pursuit of "releasing enterprise and cultural expression".

Arts director Erwina Aghafar is one of several managers criticised for taking frequent trips abroad to purchase art for NSG galleries and "forge cultural links". Ms Aghafar made at least three company trips to Malaysia in the past two years, spending £60,000 on an "Oriental kitchen", shipped back for NSG's £13.8m Contemporary Urban Centre in Liverpool. Thousands were also spent on decorative woodwork for the centre and a £260,000 Chinese theatre, also in Liverpool, which closed within months of its 2007 opening due to lack of use.

Rough Sleepers was a "haute-couture boutique with a conscience" in Camden, London, designed by Japanese artist Sonoko Obuchi to look like a giant shopping trolley and envisaged to raise money for the socially disadvantaged. Despite non-existent sales, its managers enjoyed several jaunts to Paris Fashion Week "for networking purposes" on the company credit card. It closed in February 2008 with heavy losses.

Around the same time, reports began to emerge of inadequate levels of care in some Novas hostels. Elderly residents in Arlington House, also in Camden, complained of being without heating for weeks. NSG denies this, though it admits staff numbers were cut from 800 to 380 in the last four years as the group sold off all its 16 hostels, bar one in Kent that awaits sale.

For years, the true extent of Novas's problems was obscured by the group's extensive property and social housing portfolio. The group reported operating losses of £277,700 in the financial year 2006-07 – before Novas merged with Scarman Trust and Path National and accumulated their debts in December 2007. The same year, however, it sold assets worth £2.3m.

Novas Scarman Group has still not filed accounts for 2007-08 but two subsidiary companies, Novas Social Enterprises and Path National, revealed losses of £501,914 and £276,365 respectively over that period. Path National's accounts include a cash loan from NSG of £595,000.

Even when government inspectors were at the door last October, the charity claimed: "NSG has a robust balance sheet, with assets of over £40m with no loans against these."

POVERTY RELIEF

Following the profit

YET another business aimed at relieving poverty has been privatised, this time with no public or parliamentary announcement at all.

Eight years ago publicly-owned development fund CDC, formerly the Commonwealth Development Corporation, set up a joint venture with Norwegian government-owned Norfund, to address a shortage in investment in small "start-up" businesses in the developing world.

The joint venture, named Aureos, managed CDC's investments in 139 grassroots businesses alongside investing funds it could raise in its own right. It wasn't long, however, before Aureos started going the same profit driven way as CDC. Most of the early investments were sold off while the firm sought more substantial, and profitable, uses for its money.

As happened with the 2004 sale of CDC's main fund management arm as Actis, plans were also put in place to hand Aureos to its managers, many of them former CDC people, including current chief executive Sev Vettivetpillai. In 2006 the bosses were sold 26.5 percent of the company, then a further 22.5 percent. Finally, towards the end of last year, they snaffled up the remaining 51 percent. This, insisted CDC chief executive Richard Laing in his last annual report, was "the next logical step for Aureos" – the logic presumably being that managing development funds should be privatised at all costs.

Now Aureos, like other private equity operations, "focuses on yield" and "later stage", as opposed to start-up, businesses with returns at a tasty 15-20 percent. CDC says the sell-off "will enable the company to attract even more private sector capital for its funds in the developing world. This can only be a good thing for developing a vibrant private sector in poor countries".

The effect on profits appears impressive, although since parent company Aureos Capital Ltd is registered in the tax haven of Mauritius, it's hard to see the full extent of these. But the British company employing the staff shows income in 2008 of $3.4m, generating pre-tax profits of $112,000. Its highest paid director, presumably Vetivetpillai, earned more than $400,000, while the 13 remaining staff averaged $115k each. Yet CDC sold its remaining 25.5 percent stake for $78,000, indicating a total value of around $300,000. Even though CDC retains some right to share in increases in the value of Aureos for five years, this looks like another bargain for the bosses, just like the Actis sell-off. CDC points out that the value was agreed with Ernst & Young. So that's all right then.

The deal doesn't look so rosy for the world's poor, though. In a recent interview in Kenya, one of the bosses of a new South Africa-based development fund aimed at small businesses, Grofin, pointed out that Aureos had moved away from the small deals that are widely seen as key to growth at the grassroots. Ironically, having launched Aureos on its big-is-better trajectory, CDC has now committed $30m to Grofin (amid far more publicity than it gave its sale of Aureos), which is still nothing like the amount Aureos has withdrawn.

MOUNTAIN RAILWAYS

The bills are alive

TOUGH times for the troubled and ludicrously costly Cairngorm Mountain Railway, which was taken into public ownership by the Highlands and Islands Enterprise (HIE) quango last year to save it from going bust.

Not only is the project now under review by Audit Scotland, but the European commission (EC) is asking for its money back after finding that rules on grant aid were broken.

The European contribution to the funicular railway is one of a number of grants the EC is demanding be repaid by the Scottish government after auditors found compliance problems in 27 out of the 40 big spending projects they looked into. The EC's decision note concludes that an "illegal criterion" was used in awarding the funicular construction contract in 1999.

Questions were already being asked about HIE's handling of the scheme, intended to develop the Cairngorm ski resort, back in 2000 when a non-executive director quit and spoke out about it. Alan Blackshaw resigned as a non-executive board member of Moray, Badenoch and Strathspey Enterprise (MBSE, the part of the HIE network covering the Cairngorms) to raise his concerns about governance and conflicts of interest.

The original decision to build the funicular was made during Sir Fraser Morrison's tenure as chairman of HIE. He stepped down in 1998 and in 1999 the £9.6m contract to build the railway was awarded to, er, Morrison Group. In 2000 the bond between HIE and Morrison Group was strengthened when HIE chief executive Iain Robertson also quit to take a job on the company's board (as reported in *Eye 1107*).

Mr Blackshaw never alleged impropriety on their part. However, in response to his concerns that there could be a perception of conflict, MBSE sniped to the *Sunday Herald* that since joining the board his own contribution and attendance had been "modest" and that that his questioning of the accounting for the project "betrays his lack of understanding". Hm.

Mr Blackshaw also raised issues about wildly optimistic visitor projections. His concerns proved well-founded, as according to Audit Scotland's project brief for the current review, "numbers have been lower than expected", which has been a major factor in the operating company's financial difficulties. He still believes the eventual cost of the funicular to the public purse will be around £50m, plus another £50m to remove it from the mountain when its life is over.

Audit Scotland is due to report in the autumn.

PUBS

Unfunny RICS farce

LAST MONTH dismayed shareholders of Lloyds Banking Group discovered another skeleton in the cupboard of its partner of six months, HBOS. It had lost nearly £500m on a preposterous loan of nearly £1bn made to tawdry "pubco", Admiral Taverns.

Admiral had used the money to buy scores of unwanted pubs from bigger and sharper operators on the pub scene such as Enterprise Inns, Punch Taverns, Scottish & Newcastle and Greene King – usually, it now appears, paying well over the odds.

It was the latest confirmation that in recent years the pub trade, for many of the major players, has not been about real ale or lager. The game, which has attracted speculators such as Stephen Conway of Galliard Homes and tycoons Jack Petchey and Robert Tchenguiz, was a lucrative property play, while the boom lasted, in which rents were unaffected by normal market forces and pub tenants were forced to pay ludicrous wholesale beer prices through the system known as the "tie" (*see Eye*s 1237 & 1238).

Vital to the pubco scams that have kept rents artificially high for years – and driven thousands of pub tenants to the wall – has been the cooperation of members of the Royal Institute of Chartered Surveyors (RICS), who are employed to give valuation guidance to the pub sector.

Pub rents are calculated using a valuation system call the "profits method". The system uses a hypothetical assessment of what a pub might take and what it might cost to run. The profit calculated is called the "divisible balance". In the pub sector this, for no good reason, is usually split 50/50 bet-ween the pub owner and the tenant. Rents are based on these fantasy figures. In real life tenants can find themselves working 80 hours a week for less than 5 percent of the actual profit. A survey of tied pub tenants recently found that more than half only earned £15,000, even when their pubs had sales of more than £500,000. The tenant does the work and carries the risk while the pubco takes the money.

The duffers at RICS "sub-contract" much of the laborious task of writing valuation guidance to so-called "trade-related" groups. The trade-related valuation group (TRVG) dealing with pub rents was, until recently, chaired by Rob "Pub Expert" May FRICS. Mr May is the national rent controller for, er, pubco giant Enterprise Inns – so no conflict there, then! Virtually all other members of the group have commercial links to pubcos, pub investors or brewers. Hardly surprising, then, that rents for pub tenants keep going up and up and bear little relation to tenants' profits or ability to pay.

May stepped down as chairman of the TRVG last year – just before the oral sessions of the Commons business & enterprise select committee inquiry into the pubcos, where he might have expected a difficult grilling. His place was taken by Martin Willis FRICS, managing director of Fleurets, a firm of valuers also closely linked to the pubcos.

Willis, less fleet of foot than May, took to the task like a cannonball to water and made an ass of himself in front of the committee. The MPs condemned the RICS and its version of the profits method as unfair and open to abuse: "Neither the pubcos nor RICS have taken any serious action to make sure the rental system is not unfairly biased against the lessee… the valuation method used to establish rents for public houses needlessly lacks the transparency and simplicity of the methods used for other commercial properties…"

Although RICS director of valuation David Rusholme indicated that the RICS would respond positively to MPs' criticisms, subsequent leaks revealed that the view of his members was that select committee chairman Peter Luff and his colleagues had been "cheeky" in questioning the fairness and transparency of RICS members.

It seems likely that the RICS will fall under further impertinent scrutiny as a legal review by a leading counsel hired by The Fair Pint Campaign, a group of pub tenants campaigning to abolish the tie, emerges as a possibility. In the meantime Lloyds shareholders might be well advised to find out more about pub valuations for themselves.

Now that the UK taxpayer is a major pub owner, through Lloyds in Admiral Taverns and RBS (see *Eye* 1237), perhaps Lord Mandy will take up the MPs' recommendation to get a round in with the Competition Commission and put an end to the pubco racket. That really would be cause for trebles all round.

'Publican'

FOSTER CARE

Put it down to Happen stance...

WITH record numbers of children being taken into care in the wake of the Baby P scandal and a chronic shortage of foster carers, one might have expected that those who take in needy, often damaged, children would be valued and respected. But not if the case of Christine and Tony Peters* is anything to go by.

First, they learned that their own children and foster children in their care had been put at risk when a teenage boy with a history of sexual abuse had twice been placed in respite care with them. His unhappy history was not revealed to them by the fostering agency Happen Fostercare Ltd, or by Northamptonshire council.

Then, when the couple complained formally to the local authority, instead of receiving help to deal with a traumatic and potentially damaging situation, they were subjected to an investigation triggered by Happen Fostercare into their suitability as foster carers. Christine Peters was subsequently falsely labelled a "questionable foster carer with odd and distorted opinions" and "vexatious", while Happen went on to receive an "outstanding" inspection report – and has since been sold on.

In a scathing attack on the care regulators, the couple's MP, James Plaskitt, later told the Commons it was nothing but an attempt to discredit the couple in order to cover up professional failures. "First they were subject to incompetence, then to intimidation, and then they were let down by the inspecting organisation to which they turned."

That was five years ago. However, despite the then children's minister, Margaret Hodge, acknowledging that the handling of the couple's complaint "had not been good enough", their continuing attempts to bring to account those running Happen at the time, and those behind the efforts to discredit them, have failed; as have their attempts to have false allegations against them removed from local authority and regulatory records.

Mr Plaskitt, MP for Warwick and Leamington, has been forced to enter the battle on their behalf again, this time asking Ofsted, the new regulatory body, to intervene. He told the *Eye*: "This couple have been subjected to a grave injustice, which persistent institutional failure has failed to rectify."

It started back in 2002, when the couple learned (from another foster carer) that a 13 year old who had been placed with them had been abused and was himself the subject of concerns about sexualised behaviour with other children. The couple were concerned for their own four small children and other children in their care at the time, in particular a 12 year old who had been out bike riding with the boy.

Mrs Peters raised the matter with the agency; and on advice from the Fostering Network, which supports foster-carers, subsequently made a formal complaint to the county council. It transpired that the boy's social worker had noted on his referral records to the agency that he had been abused by a neighbour, a known paedophile, but there was no further detail and none was requested by Happen. Had Christine and Tony Peters been told of the boy's history, they would not have taken him in. But why would an authority and an agency place such a child with a family of young children in the first place? Northamptonshire carried out its investigation and subsequently apologised to the Peters for its failings, an apology the couple were happy to accept.

Happen Fostercare, it seems, went into denial. The day after it received a copy of the complaint, it sent two members of staff to visit the Peters. This was not to offer practical support or to discuss any issues of "harm" that may have arisen out of the teenager's contact with their own children and the foster child who had contact with him. Instead they gave the couple an agenda of "concerns" about their suitability as carers, questioning their commitment and ability to cope. They were dumbstruck.

Happen also disseminated its concerns to local authorities forcing the couple to withdraw from the agency. In the meantime it had also appointed an "independent" social worker, Tony Williams, of Williams Ross consultancy, to review the Peters' registration as foster carers. He never met the couple because the review was abandoned when they left the agency – but he was still to play a crucial part in events to come.

The Peters decided to make a formal grievance about Happen Fostercare's treatment of them to the National Care Standards Commission (NCSC). They added a further complaint about the agency after learning that, before obtaining a criminal records check, it had employed a male support worker who turned out to have been under investigation for watching porn and smoking dope with children.

It was to take two years and three subsequent reviews to finally get both complaints upheld. The first report by the NCSC focused on Happen's concerns about the foster carers (which only surfaced after the couple had complained); the second rectified some inaccuracies in the first and partially upheld the complaints – but then suggested Mrs Peters was partly to blame for the overzealous manner in which she had pursued her complaints.

The Peters subsequently learned that the NCSC had received and depended on three reports which were critical of them. Two were from people brought in and paid by Happen to investigate, including Mr Williams, who although he had never met the couple was still happy to pass on his "impressions" of them; questioning, among other things, if the time spent pursuing their complaints could affect the day to day care of the children in their care. The third was Tony Puliafito, then commissioning officer for Warwickshire county council, which also used Happen. He had never spoken to the couple, let alone met them, before he wrote that he shared Happen's concerns. He was forced to retract fully his comments to the NCSC and apologise to the Peters after they complained to the ombudsman.

The many letters from social workers and others praising the couple's "dedication" and "genuine commitment" to the children in their care were largely ignored – as indeed was the devastating impact on the couple of the lack of support for what they had been through and the subsequent attacks on their suitability as carers. And little attention was paid to the potentially disastrous placement in their home of a teenage boy with a history of sexual abuse.

It was not until a third and final review, in March 2004, which was highly critical of how the couple had been treated, that their complaints against Happen were finally upheld. The report concluded that Happen's agenda of concerns about the Peters "were manipulated" after the placement of the abused child with them and that "considerable efforts were made to discredit the foster carers' competence and reliability with the placing authorities, which could have damaged their future careers." It said there had been too little emphasis on the agency's failings and far too little focus on the fitness of the Happen's then proprietors, Carol and Brian Henderson.

Armed with this report in the Commons, Mr Plaskitt accused the regulator of "very serious failures". Finally the Peters believed that action would be taken and their reputations restored. How wrong they were.

The regulatory body, by now the Commission for Social Care Inspection, (CSCI) instead carried out an internal review of the way the couple's complaints had been handled. It reported in 2006 and for the Peters it was back to square one. It questioned the "tone, balance, objectivity" of the third report, and concluded the complaints process had had a detrimental impact on those running Happen Fostercare – never mind the Peters or the children at the centre of the affair. Plaskitt said this was a shameful attempt to vindicate itself and turn the onus back on to the Peters. The CSCI had reintroduced factual inaccuracies about what the agency had been told about both the abused child, and over the employment status of the support worker.

Amazingly the experience has not turned the couple away from fostering, but their frustration at the way they have been treated has forced them to pursue complaints through every channel they can. After the internal review, they even took their file to the police, who in turn took it back to the regulators.

Their final push had been through Ofsted, which is now responsible for regulating child care. But Christine Gilbert, its chief, has said that while she is 'sympathetic' to the couple, there is nothing Ofsted can now do. That is not accepted by Mr Plaskitt, who believes that at the very least Ofsted can issue a public apology to the Peters and order that all untrue and damaging statements about them be corrected on local authority and fostering records. He is waiting for a response. "At a time when the need for good foster care has never been greater, no one can afford to treat dedicated carers so shabbily," he said.

**The names of the foster carers have been changed to protect the identity of the children involved.*

CONTAMINATED BLOOD

Widows pique

IN THE row following the government's contemptuous response to the Archer inquiry's demands for better compensation for haemophiliacs condemned to death or protracted illness from the use of contaminated blood products, one set of victims was forgotten.

They are the 230 widows whose lives were ruined by what was described as "the worst treatment scandal in NHS history" when their husbands died from liver cancers and cirrhosis caused by hepatitis infection – and who have never qualified for a penny in "discretionary" payments.

Unlike the widows of those infected with HIV, who qualify for payments from the Macfarlane and Eileen Trusts, the widows of those with Hep C rely on the Skipton Fund, which only makes payments to widows whose husbands had already applied for assistance before their death.

Lord Archer had demanded much larger payouts for hardship caused to all 3,000 surviving haemophiliacs as well as widows and dependants. Around 4,800 haemophiliacs were originally infected by the use of contaminated blood products in the 70s and 80s, much of it imported from prisoners and drug addicts in the US.

The government's response was to agree to double the £12,800 annual payment to the 600 with HIV while doing nothing at all for the majority who have Hep C, and whose fate is equally devastating. Ministers promised only a review of the way the Skipton Fund operates in 2014.

That may be too late for widows like Harriet Bullock, 75, whose husband suffered a protracted death from liver failure caused by the Hep C he contracted from blood transfusions and clotting treatment after having a tooth removed in 1982. She was forced to sell the family home to make ends meet.

But then government reaction to the bad blood scandal has always been marked by delay. Since the Archer inquiry was set up in 2007, another 200 haemophiliacs have died. How many will be left when the government agrees to compensate them fairly?

In the City

"IT REMAINS a principle of the greatest importance that, unless there are compelling reasons for doing otherwise, which will not exist in the generality of cases, there should be public access to hearings in chambers and information available as to what occurred at such hearings."

So said Lord Woolf, then Master of the Rolls and later to become Lord Chief Justice, in a 1998 Appeal Court ruling. The following year Woolf emphasised: "It is so important not to forget why proceedings are required to be subjected to the full glare of a public hearing... It also maintains the public's confidence in the administration of justice. It enables the public to know that justice is being administered impartially."

Open justice is something much talked about by judges but increasingly not seen in courts, especially where powerful vested interests are involved who can afford to throw money at obtaining the secrecy they want – even if that thwarts the public interest, such as in effective City regulation. All too often, narrow private interest is considered far more important than the Woolf principles by judges, especially where the reputations or embarrassment of prominent individuals or companies are concerned.

The response of High Court judges to the unprecedented and, until the intervention of *Private Eye*, successful efforts of leading accountants Ernst & Young to prevent one City regulator, the beancounters' Joint Disciplinary Scheme, communicating the adverse findings of a tribunal into the firm's flawed audits at Equitable Life to the City's top regulator, the Fundamentally Supine Authority, evidenced just how readily Woolf is ignored.

For six months the High Court – at a time when the government is under pressure to compensate Equitable pension policyholders for accepted "maladministration" by its regulators – allowed E&Y to gag the JDS. This not only vetoed the decision to send the tribunal's findings against the firm and one of its former partners who had audited Equitable to the FSA, but also prevented the JDS from even stating that the tribunal had reached a decision, or that E&Y was appealing against that decision.

The JDS was prevented from even admitting that the E&Y injunction existed, or why it had been made. And the entire proceedings were cloaked in secrecy. The interim injunction granted to E&Y two days before Christmas by Mr Justice Flaux gives a whole new meaning to regulatory capture.

This occurred at a time when the effectiveness of City regulation in general and that by the FSA in particular had been called into severe question and ridiculed for its failures over the banks in the run-up to the credit crisis. But such matters, like the secrecy of the proceedings, did not seem to bother first Mr Justice Flaux or later Mr Justice Silber, who in April confirmed that secrecy should continue while giving E&Y permission to obtain a judicial review of the JDS decision to tell the FSA.

The fact that the JDS was on E&Y's case over Equitable was no secret. It brought a disciplinary complaint against the firm and two former partners involved in the Equitable audit – Paul McNamara and Richard Combes, although the case against Combes was dropped because of ill health – in September 2004 for producing unqualified audit opinions from 1990 to 2000, failing to understand Equitable's business and failing to act with independence and objectivity. Equitable all but collapsed in 2000 after it was faced with a potential liability of at least £1.5bn.

"It's Madoff's idea. When he's over, we all follow him up from the bottom"

The tribunal proceedings were suspended in November 2004 pending the outcome of Equitable's abortive civil claim against its auditors. This ended in 2005 when the insurers dropped their negligence claim. Throughout, the E&Y public position has been to deny any negligence or failing in its Equitable audits. So keeping the bad news of the tribunal's contrary opinion out of the public domain for as long as possible was clearly job one.

The tribunal's private hearing lasted 66 days over five months in 2007. Its report was finalised on 9 October 2008, and the following month it decided on the penalties and costs to be imposed. Both report and penalties will not be disclosed until after an appeal due in October.

On 9 December the JDS executive committee decided to send a copy of the report to the FSA, Equitable's regulator, in accordance with rules introduced in 2005. E&Y was informed of this decision by a letter dated 19 December. The firm strongly objected.

There were "undoubted present strong public interest considerations in matters touching the Equitable Life failure," JDS executive committee secretary Matthew Ives told E&Y's lawyers, Mayer Brown International, on 22 December. He repeated this on 23 December. "The present public interest importance of matters involving Equitable Life and the FSA's role as regulator both before and after 2001 were the overriding factors which lead the committee to determine that the report should be sent."

But E&Y's lawyers insisted that the public interest in Equitable was "an irrelevant consideration" and that sending the report to the FSA amounted to publication before any appeal and so was against the JDS's own rules. The JDS agreed to delay sending the report for further discussion, but that same day E&Y went to court.

Despite the JDS's objections that there was no publication in the sense of making the findings public, Mr Justice Flaux decided that E&Y's interests were somehow more important than the public interest or those of the FSA. The accountants obtained an injunction preventing the JDS from disclosing the report to anyone until the completion of an appeal process, which at that stage had not even begun. The injunction also forbade the JDS from disclosing its existence to any third party. It was to remain in place pending a judicial review of the decision to send the report to the FSA. Remarkably, the JDS was forced to pay the costs of the hearing that had silenced it!

There was no question under JDS rules of the tribunal's findings being published or made public until after the appeal. But E&Y claimed that even sending the report to the FSA amounted to "publication" in the narrow legal sense used in defamation cases and so should not happen. The FSA itself would also have treated the report in confidence, but for Flaux that did not matter.

Flaux also ordered that the JDS could not even make a statement that there was an appeal by E&Y. In previous disciplinary situations the JDS would confirm that the tribunal had made a finding and that it was being appealed. The firm did not want anyone to know that it had been found at fault over Equitable.

The JDS wanted to have the injunction removed quickly. But no substantial hearing took place until 3 April, before Mr Justice Silber. The hearing was described in that day's court list as "The Queen on the application of E v E".

Private Eye attended that hearing and requested it be held in public on the grounds of the presumption of open justice and the public interest relating to both Equitable and City regulation. If necessary, as in the criminal courts, it was suggested reporting restrictions could be imposed until the judicial review was decided.

Silber – who admitted that he, like many judges and lawyers, had been an Equitable policyholder – stated that reporting restrictions were not appropriate, decided to continue the proceedings in secret and refused to provide a copy of either his order or that by Flaux. The normal procedure is for the media to be provided with court orders so journalists can see what can be published. Silber sided with E&Y against the JDS and gave permission for the judicial review hearing in private. This was later set for 22 June.

On 12 June, *Private Eye*'s lawyers, Davenport Lyons, applied to the High Court for copies of the court orders and requested that the 22 June hearing be in public. Davenport Lyons had tried and failed to examine the court file for E v E because of an order – which they could not see – preventing third parties from seeing the court documents.

The response from Mayer Brown was to seek a court order preventing any publication or access by *Private Eye* at a hearing on 19 June before Mr Justice Gross. Their position was that E&Y's right to confidentiality and privacy was in the interests of justice.

Private Eye was not represented at that hearing but Davenport Lyons wrote to the court on 18 June requesting that the judicial review be in public, pointing to the Woolf rulings on the importance of open justice, suggesting that there could be reporting restrictions and asking that the existing court orders be made available.

Mr Justice Gross indicated during the 19 June hearing that he was concerned about the issue of secrecy. And, perhaps most tellingly, he stated that he wanted to read the Appeal Court ruling in May over the case involving *Private Eye* and solicitor Michael Napier (*Eye* 1237). On that occasion the Appeal Court removed an injunction which for five months had prevented *Private Eye* reporting that Napier and his law firm Irwin Mitchell had been formally reprimanded by the Law Society and were the subject of a highly critical ombudsman's report into the Law

☛ *See over...*

THE DIRECTORS
IT'S ALL DIFFERENT NOW... I GET A MASSIVE BONUS AND YOU GET A PAY CUT.
SALES
ER, WHAT'S DIFFERENT ABOUT THAT?
DREDGE & RIGG
EVERYONE'S TOO BUSY HATING THEIR M.P. TO CARE!

Society's investigation. "It is singularly unattractive to argue that confidentiality should be recognised by the law in order to protect the interests of a solicitor against whom an adverse finding has been made," declared Lords Justice Toulson, Hughes and Sullivan.

Gross did not agree to either the 19 June hearing or the judicial review hearing being in public. But he indicated that maintaining secrecy beyond that hearing was debatable. What he did agree was that for the first time the existence of the proceedings between E&Y and the JDS could be published. The Equitable cat was about to jump out of the bag.

That Friday evening, E&Y threw in the towel and informed the court it was abandoning the judicial review. The following Monday morning Mr Justice Gross discharged the Flaux injunction and awarded costs to the JDS, which are expected to be between £50,000 and £75,000.

E&Y will have probably spent another £100,000-plus itself to prevent the world knowing that it has been criticised for its role in the Equitable scandal. It estimated its costs for the two-hour Silber hearing alone at £40,000. But it has managed to keep government, the FSA and policyholders in the dark since December while maintaining that it was in no way to blame for Equitable's near collapse.

The E&Y tactics were all about delaying inevitable reputational damage and embarrassment. The tribunal findings would have become known irrespective of the result of the appeal. This publication will probably now be by the end of the year. Had the E&Y gambit worked, only they would have known the verdict on their role in the Equitable scandal for more than 12 months.

SO NOW the Serious Farce Office is to be handed the MG Rover parcel four years and £16m after outside inspectors have completed an investigation into the car company's collapse and the £40m enrichment of its owners, the Phoenix Four.

Passing the report to the SFO will ensure that the report (which, it can be assumed, is not complimentary about the MG Rover directors) will not be published for months if there is no prosecution and years if there is – because of the risk of prejudicing any trial or appeals. That was why, after the Guinness fiasco where the report was not published for 11 years after the events it investigated, then trade secretary Michael Heseltine said never again to such futile history lessons.

But of course, just as the announcement of the investigation ahead of the 2005 general election saved Labour red faces after it backed the Phoenix Four with taxpayers' money, so this move by Peter Mandelson could save Labour some embarrassment all over again before next year's election.

STAND by for a blizzard of positive PR from the SFO and its media fans with the publication next week of the first annual report under new director Richard "Grey Man" Alderman.

One item which may be overlooked is the £81,697 spent on a one-day bonding session for all staff at the Park Plaza Riverbank Hotel in London earlier this year. This was to "talk the organisation through its vision and 2009-10 business plan and then allow staff to explore these in more detail through a series of practical workshops".

That included actors voicing the complaints of "victims" of SFO treatment and attractive female consultants from Involve UK – paid £52,848 – explaining to increasingly disenchanted SFO staff how "transformation" was like the grieving process. No doubt all that will strike fear into the Phoenix Four.

'Slicker'

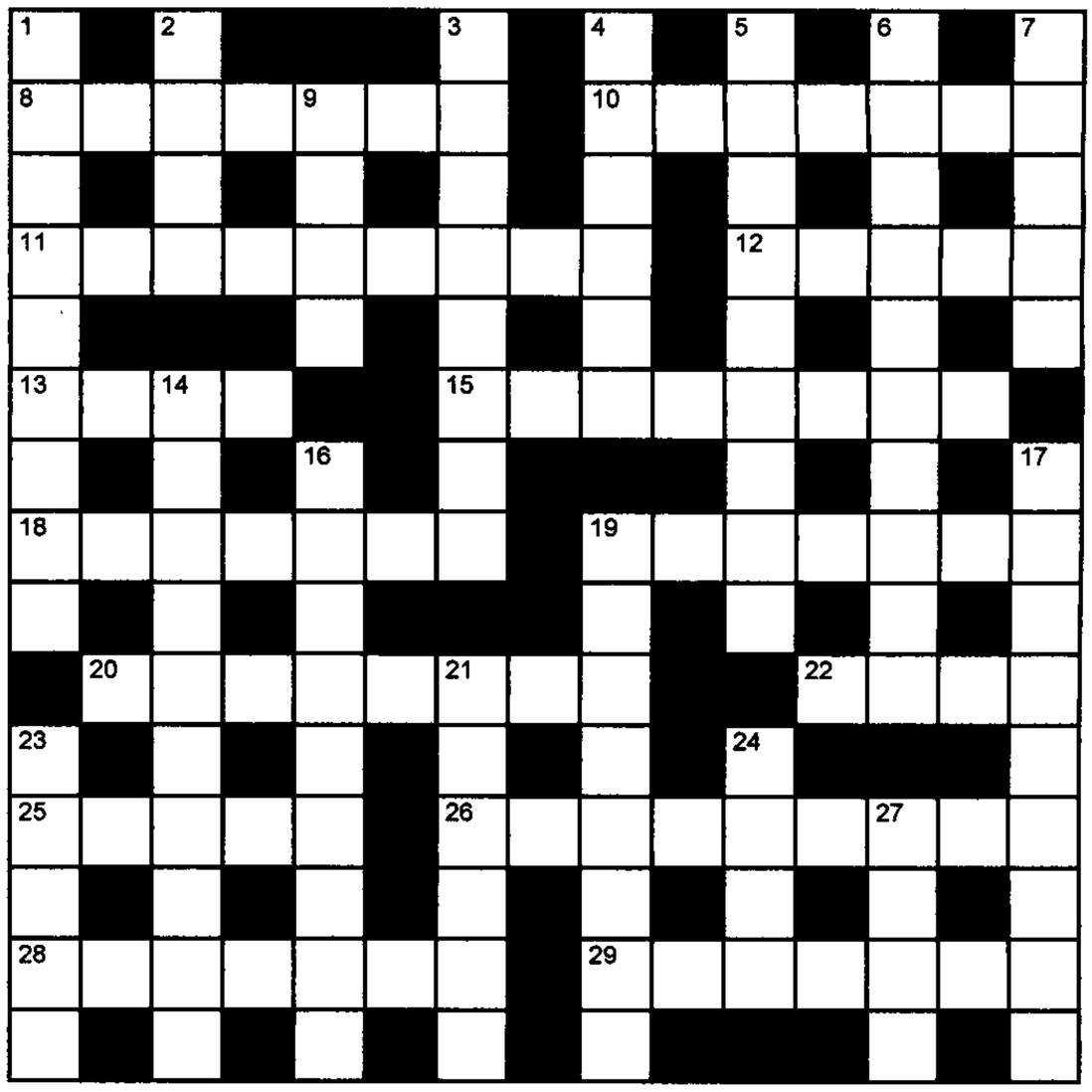
QUOTE OF THE WEEK

Also, I only go to places where I have an account. Settling the bill is such an irksome waste of time.

City PR guru ROLAND RUDD ,
***Financial Times* 'How to Spend It' magazine**

EYE CROSSWORD 395

by Cyclops



£100 prize to first correct solution opened on 17 July 2009

Entries to 'Crossword', Private Eye, 6 Carlisle Street, London W1D 3BN or via email to crossword@private-eye.co.uk

ACROSS

8 Breaking mould after House makes you a crook (7)

10 Has screwed a banger, not far from Dover (7)

11 CIA's pissed with Al Gore dropping round for Spanish port (9)

12 US body sending people up, connected with length of organ (5)

13/15 Demoted Thatcher follower becomes dancing star (4,8)

18 Act like a copper deviously out to secure one in jail (7)

19 Love Hillary's middle being in gonad-busting car (7)

20 Little devil interrupts rendition of poem with casual shit (8)

22 Dodgy erection saint eliminated (4)

25 Back-to-front cap on party substitute member (5)

26 How the PM introduces himself on dropping 40%: "I log off – bit of a problem" (9)

28 Holder is penetrated by male, er, to become more gay (5,2)

29 Re-emerged novelist: career to bite the dust (7)

DOWN

1 Poor quality budget presented by Straw? (9)

2 Stink from backside of game (4)

3 Give him time? No, sir – Brown is only 50% backed (8)

4 Old ruler wheels round, sea sick (6)

5/24 Former colony's view of the English MP, Owen Higgins: corrupted (9,4)

6 Writing a novel, say, with Archer's effortless ease, being a wanker? (7,3)

7 Pornographic, dual controlled model? (5)

9 See 27dn.

14 MPs assembled with slits in trousers – they love filth (5-5)

16 Top legislators pissed with Brenda's entourage? (4,5)

17 What expenses claims represent for the MP, pisspoor yes-man Yeo? (4,5)

19 Archer at one time converted by "god" Blair (4-4)

21 Heavens! After fourth of claims by politician is in, it's next to nothing! (6)

23 Balls familiarly having twitch, front to rear regulation (5)

24 See 5dn.

27/9 Fortune made by wife of knight of the realm, topless Yank (4,4)

Crossword 394 winner: M.P. COAN

ACROSS: 7 Louvre 8 Kiboshed 10/19 Political asylum 12 Their 13/15 Expenses claims 16 Air Force One 21 Scatty 22 Uncle Sam 24 Lager 25 Successor 27 Masterly 28 Movies.

DOWN: 1 Slapper 2/26 Bullshit 3 Briton 4/25 Will Self 5 Portillo 6 Cheesiness 9 Duress 11 Credo 14 Phalangist 17 Rat-arsed 18 Cynic 20 Impress 23 Lie low.

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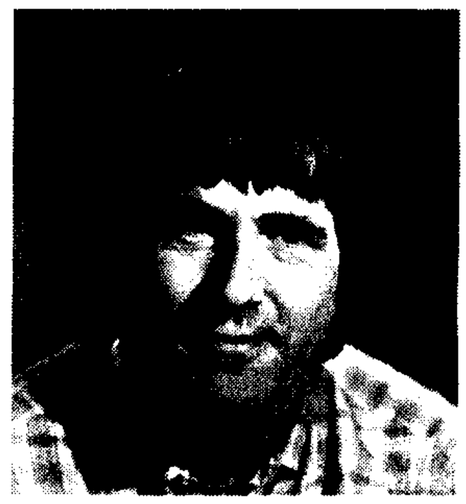

Private Eye has always aimed to awaken people's intelligence about what is happening around them.
Paul Foot, February 2003

For the fourth year running *Private Eye* and *The Guardian* are awarding a prize for investigative/campaigning journalism in memory of Paul Foot.

The overall winner will be awarded £5,000, with the 5 runners-up each receiving £1,000 at a ceremony to be held in London on 2nd November 2009.

Submissions will be accepted for material published in a newspaper, magazine or on a website between 1st September 2008 and 31st August 2009.

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www.private-eye.co.uk

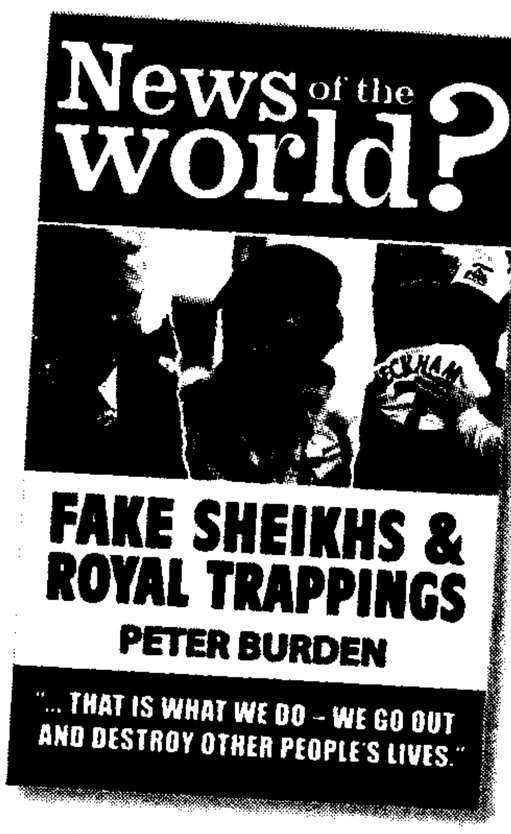
THE CLOSING DATE FOR ENTRIES IS 1st SEPTEMBER 2009

GRUB STREET

"A well documented exposure of underhand tactics, gross intrusion and embarrassing cock-ups." Derek Jameson, former editor of the *News of the World*.

Outrageous, hysterical and misleading headlines have generated sales of many millions of Red Tops, but sometimes the dodgy practices of the hacks are the real scoop.

In *News of the world? Fake Sheikhs & Royal Trappings*, Peter Burden exposes the way some journalists flout laws and invade privacy in the savage struggle to sell more copies.



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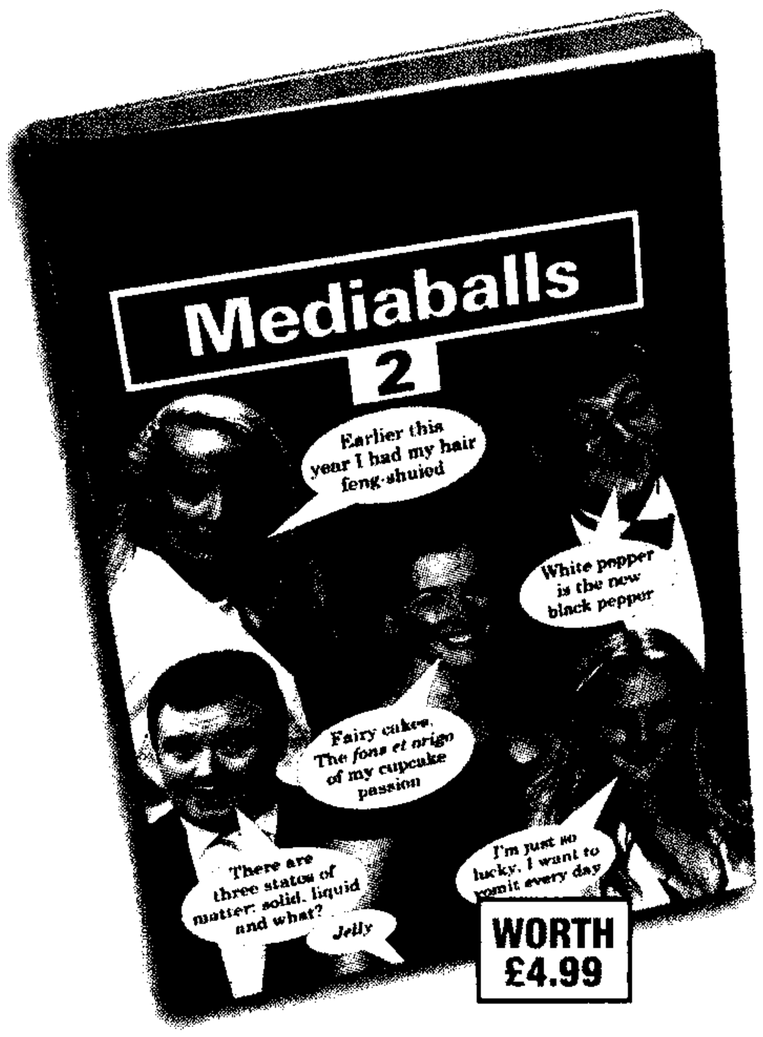
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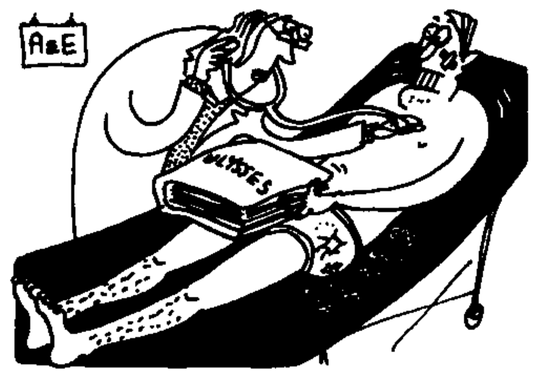

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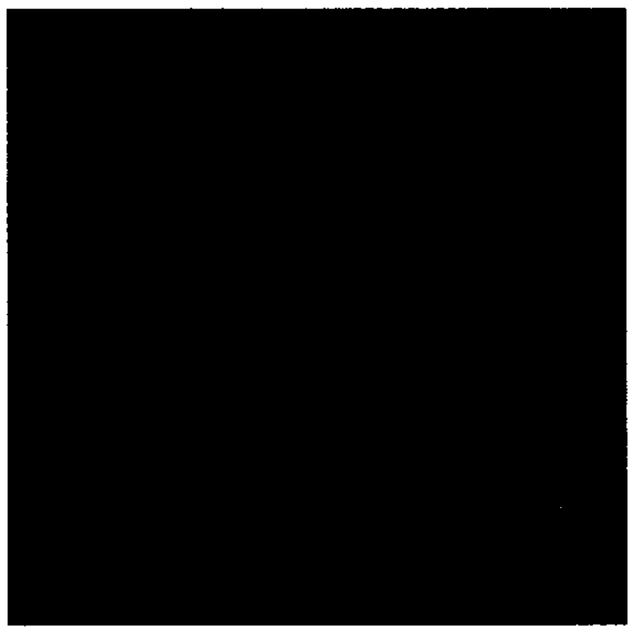

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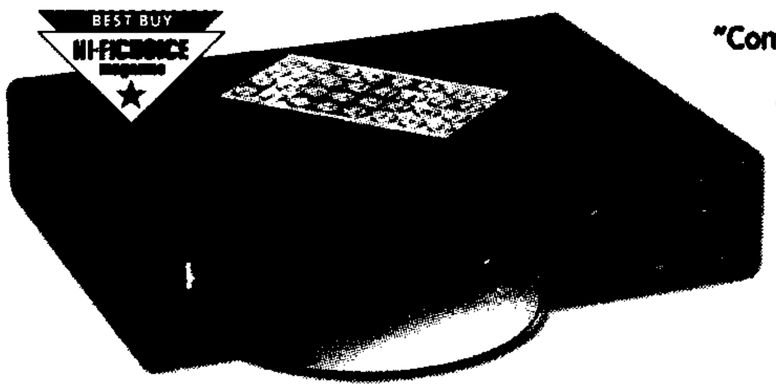

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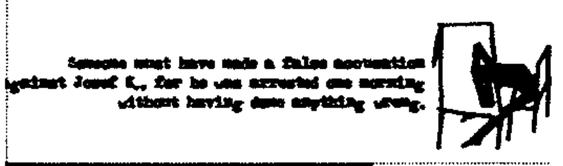
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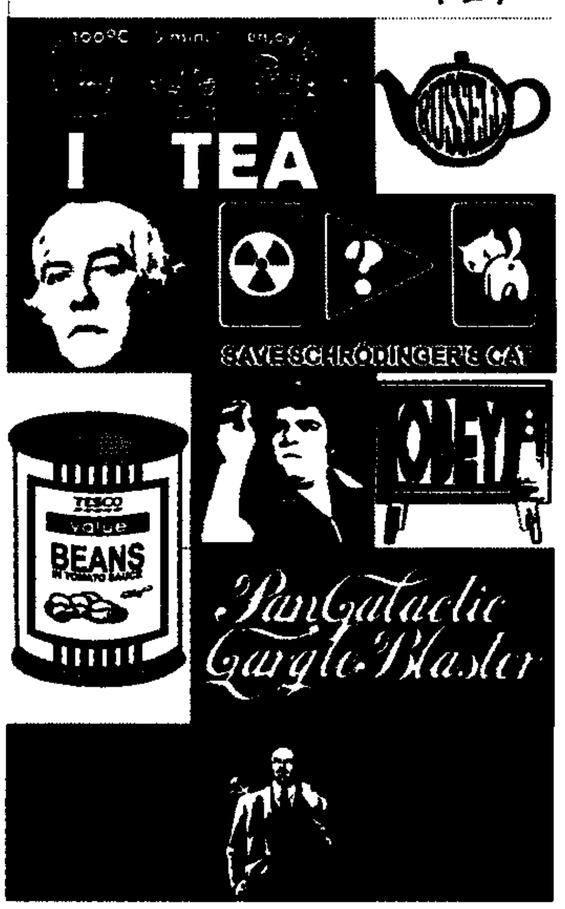

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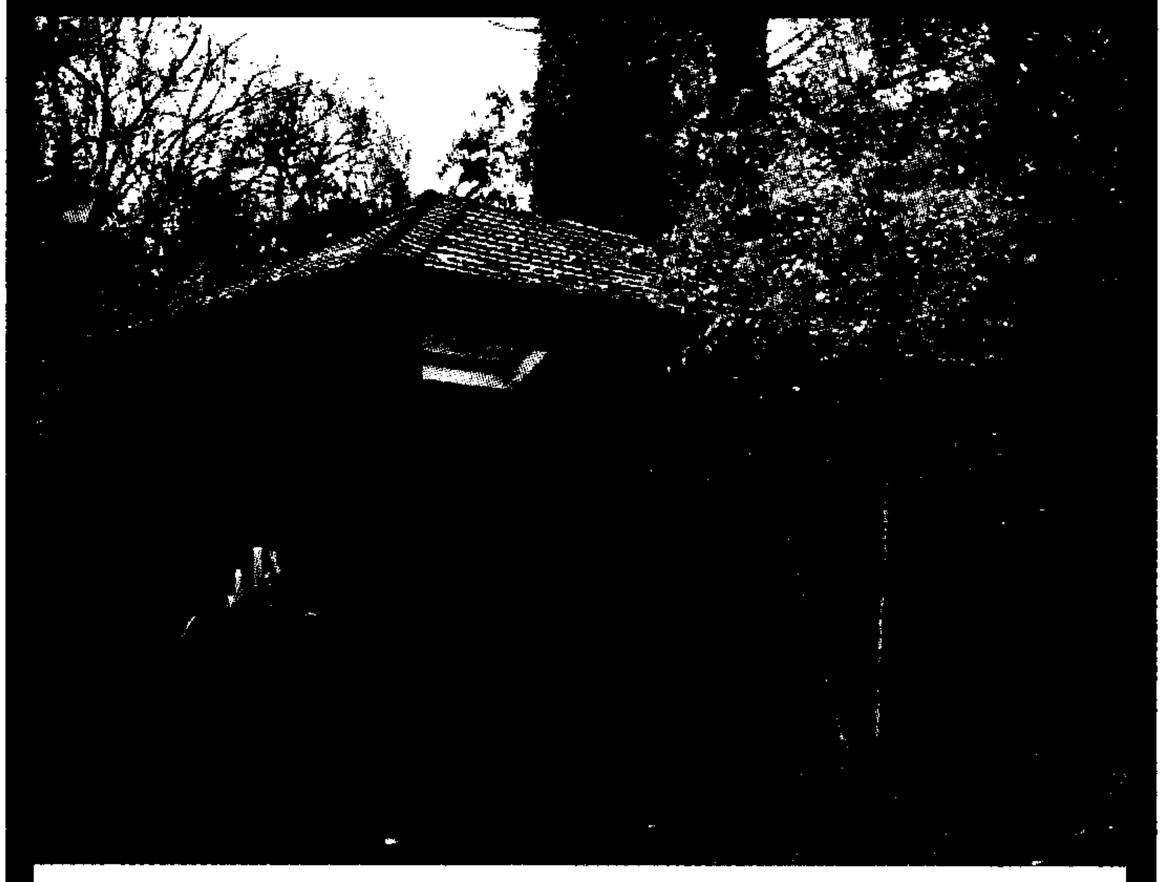

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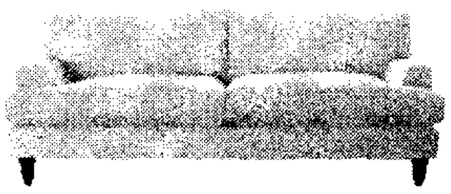

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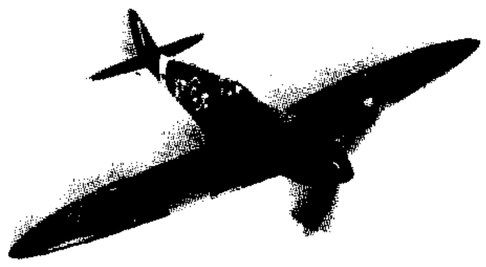

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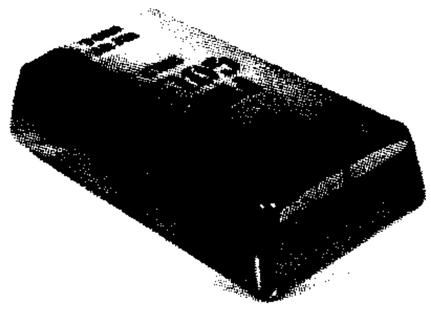

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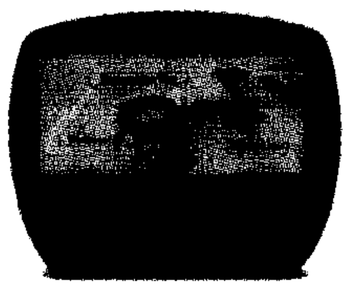

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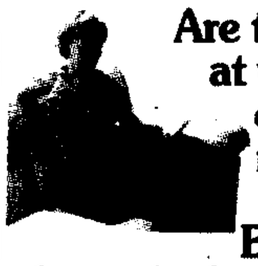

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